VACATION IN SHASTA By Rog Phillips

fantastic ADVENTURES

EBRUARY 25¢
IN CANADA 30¢

TOKA AND THE MAN BATS By J. W. PELKIE

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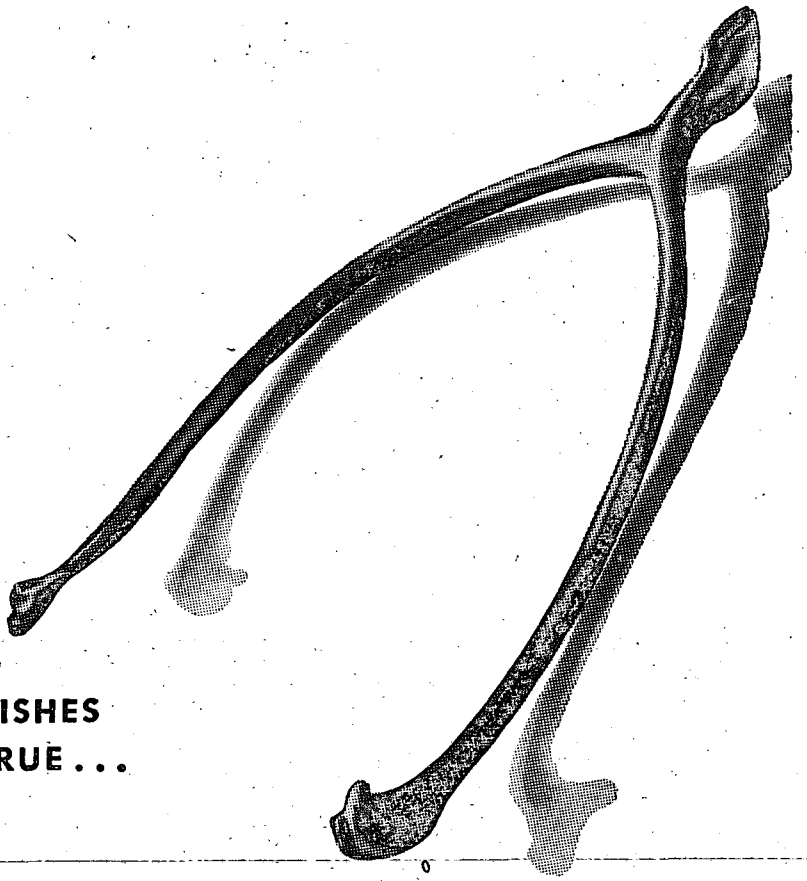

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Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

A HALF-DOZEN times in the past few years somebody has said to your editor: "Houdini made a pact, and a secret code, with his wife that he would communicate with her after he died. Well, he never did, and since he didn't, that proves there is no such thing. Houdini fought against that sort of thing all his life." And your editor has cautiously reserved his judgment. Now, however, we have discovered something that comes under the heading of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and makes a liar out of those guys who have been yelping about our "ghost" stories. You see, Houdini DID communicate with his wife, and he DID use the pre-arranged code. And the reason for the delay, he said, was because he just plain forgot the code! And if you ask us, we can hardly blame a dead man for forgetting—it must be quite an experience! Dying, we mean.

BUT to youse guys who didn't read about it in the papers, just as we didn't, a New York psychic by the name of Ford got the code and passed it on to Mrs. Houdini. The whole thing was on the up-and-up and is documented. And incidentally, Harry apologized to all the mediums he ridiculed and persecuted. If you care to, you can read all about it in a book called "The Gateway to Understanding" by Dr. Carl Wickland. And next time you read a ghost story in this magazine, don't you disbelieve it!

ALL of which leads us into a very weird story in this issue: "Vacation In Shasta" by Rog Phillips. Mt. Shasta has been the subject of a lot of mystery ever since it was proved that it was inhabited by a strange race of people who have been called everything from Lemurians to ghosts. Most interesting of those proofs is the million-dollar gold gift given by them in 1923 for the relief of earthquake-stricken Tokyo. Recent reports have it that the Shasta inhabitants have moved to some unknown portion of Mexico to avoid the tourist trade route that has been pouring all over their private mountain. However, Rog Phillips had an idea about Shasta and he wrote a story . . . well, read it and be amazed. It's a good yarn, and ain't saying it's true, but if you like ghost stories that are different . . .

BERKELEY LIVINGSTON got a glimpse of a Virgil Finlay illustration and promptly went ga-ga with flutterings of the heart—and insisted on doing a story for it. "The Life Symbol" is the result, and if the illustration and title give you any idea of what it's about, forget it because you're wrong. When Berk does a story, it just doesn't follow the usual pattern. You'll like this one, we predict.

TWO Virgil Finlays in one issue! Yep, it's true! And the story's by Lester Barclay. "Siren Song" is based on the old legend of the sirens who enticed Jason; but this story's about the war in Italy, with an ending that'll surprise you right out of your boots.

RICHARD CASEY must have been reading the Bible, because he conceived the very good idea of making a Noah's Ark out of a space ship, and to make it different, threw in a little humor. We hope you'll laugh at this one and prove that when your editor laughs over a manuscript, it isn't because he's gone nuts trying to find stories that'll make FANTASTIC ADVENTURES as good as this issue is! (In our opinion!) Have a "Lark On The Ark"!

"MOON SLAVE" is one of the very best stories Leroy Yerxa has done for us in a long time, and we think you'll find it has everything that you've come to expect from his best work. And you won't hate the illustration by H. W. McCauley either, we predict!

TO FINISH up this issue, here's a long sequel to "King Of The Dinosaurs" continuing the adventures of that new hero of the jungle, Toka the caveman of Sandcliff, that wonderful cliff city in a world of nowhere. J. W. Pelkie lives up to his reputation with another fine action yarn that will thrill you on every page.

WE'VE also dug up some very fine articles for this issue. We recommend that you read, especially, those by Vincent H. Gaddis, whose articles appear in many magazines, including the smooth-paper variety. So we're not the only editors who know a good thing when they see it.

THE cover this month is by a new artist to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. His name is Walter Parke and he's never tried this sort of thing before—which ought to impress you, because he's done a right smart job. Remember when Malcolm Smith first started? Well, this fellow Parke ought to show you something in the future!

Which brings us to the end for another sixty days. Be seeing you then . . . *Rap.*

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All STORIES Complete

MOON SLAVE (Novelet—10,000) ..... by Leroy Yerxa 6
Illustrated by H. W. McCauley
Many things happen under the moon, and because of the moon; was that why these graves were opened?

VACATION IN SHASTA (Novelet—11,000) by Rog Phillips 26
Illustrated by Robert Fuqua
Mt. Shasta is supposed to be the home of weird underground dwellers. What is its deep-hidden secret?

THE LIFE SYMBOL (Novelet—13,800) ..... by Berkeley Livingston .. 48
Illustrated by Virgil Finlay
The ancients had a symbol for everything; they had one for life that didn't always mean life . . .

LARK ON THE ARK (Short—6,000) ..... by Richard Casey 72
Illustrated by Virgil Finlay
Noah, a modern one, boards an ark of space, and the old story takes on a few new, and funny, angles!

SIREN SONG (Novelet—15,000) ..... by Lester Barclay 82
Illustrated by J. Allen St. John
Modern soldiers and sailors engaged in a war can't expect sirens to sing to them—or can they?

TOKA AND THE MAN BATS
(Short Novel—35,000) ..... by J. W. Pelkie 108
Illustrated by William Juhre
Out of the sky came the greatest of all dangers for Sandcliff—and Toka took his axe into the air.

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Front cover painting by Walter Parke illustrating a scene from "Toka and the Man Bats." Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul illustrating "Stories of the Stars."

FEBRUARY 1946

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VOLUME 8 NUMBER 1

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MOON SLAVE

By LEROY YERXA

She was lovely—more than words can tell—in the moonlight

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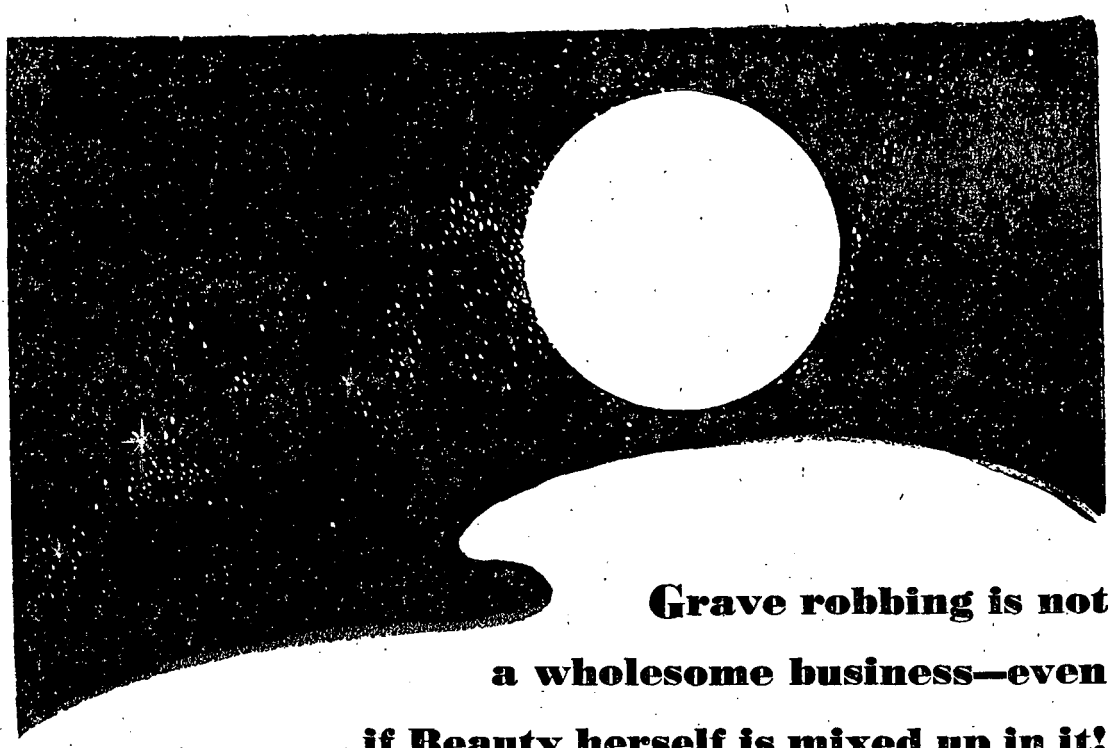

Grave robbing is not a wholesome business—even if Beauty herself is mixed up in it!

I stood near Minister Niles, watching as they lowered Lawrence Rancin's coffin into the black, rich earth of the New England graveyard. Nick Fanton, the minister, and I were the only mourners present. None of Lawrence Rancin's friends had come. They hadn't time. Evelyn, his lovely, rather spoiled wife, was too overcome with grief at the last moment to come to the cemetery. The moon, full and cold with disinterest, lighted the spot. It glinted on the shovel as Sam Peevis removed the funeral trappings and started slowly to fill in the grave.

Yes, I said the moon; for we were burying Lawrence Rancin at night, on the very night he had died, and by his own request.

None of us was very keen about the idea; but being the only one at Lawrence's death bed, I had listened to him gasp out those last wards; and felt it my duty to see that his wish was granted.

The grave was filling slowly, and the cement box that held the coffin and all that remained of Rancin, had disappeared from sight. I felt the minister's hand on my arm and it startled me. I guess I drew away from him quite suddenly, because he cleared his throat and spoke in a low voice.

"Don't you think we can leave now?"

I managed a smile, because I didn't want him to know how I felt just then.

"You go back," I said. "Nick and I promised to stay."

I looked across at Nick Fanton's pale face and saw him nod. Minister Niles turned without a word, kept his eyes down-cast on the moon-lighted gravel road and walked toward town. The steady "clump clump" of falling clods, and his footsteps against the gravel were the only sounds in the graveyard. Then the grave was filled. Sam Peevis tapped it down neatly, wiped his shovel on a piece of burlap and looked at us questioningly.

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"Here, Sam," Nick said. "Go down to town and warm your stomach with a few bottles of ale."

It was the first time he had spoken since we came. Sam Peevis grinned nervously and accepted the five-spot. He pushed it deep into his pocket.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "I believe I'll do that very thing.

His feet beat a tattoo on the gravel, and I knew why he was in such a hurry. It wasn't like Sam Peevis to fear a place in which he had spent most of his life. Tonight was different, however. Sam Peevis wanted to see the lights of town again, and forget what had caused this bit of midnight business.

Nick and I just stood there and looked at each other. Then he stared down at the freshly filled grave.

"I guess that's all we can do," he said. "Let's get out of here."

He started to jump the grave, then thought better of it, circled the mound and took my arm.

I felt suddenly savage. "It wasn't right, Nick. Larry was a decent guy. He didn't deserve . . ."

He didn't interrupt me. I got control of myself and shut up. It was better that way.

At the entrance of the graveyard we stopped and looked back through the thick, interlacing branches of the giant elm trees at the lonely spot we had just left.

"Maybe he's better off," Nick said. "He was completely, hopelessly lost."

LARRY RANCIN had been a happily married man of thirty. His banking business in New York went smoothly enough. His wife, Evelyn, was the most attractive woman on the Bay. Yet Rancin had seen the vision of Cory Rock and gone mad over her.

I have seen her also. Sometimes, when the moon is bright, you can stand at the point and see her out there, sitting on the rock, the waves lashing up angrily at her. She sits there, afraid of nothing, her long wavy hair touched by moon silver and blowing in the wind.

Sometimes she seems to be without clothing, and sometimes the moon weaves tiny half moons about her, that form a dancing, jewel-like setting about her hair and her waist.

Men have seen her dive cleanly into the water and disappear, not to be seen again for many nights.

I can't deny that she affects you strongly. Whether she was an illusion, or some wild, lovely child of the coast, I didn't know. I didn't care. That first night on Rigger's Bay, I had to fight every nerve inside me to prevent myself from diving into the water and swimming to her.

Lawrence Rancin saw the girl also. He must have, because his lips formed two words before he died, and I knew who he was talking about. In the evening we dragged his half-dead body from the water below the cliff.

His arms and legs were torn and crushed by the force of the sea. A sea that pounds relentlessly against the high rocks. We carried him up to the Fanton house and called the doctor, and his wife, Evelyn. Oddly, Evelyn seemed angry. She refused to watch his burial. I remember those last two words, whispered to me in the lamplight while he turned his head restlessly and stared out at the sea. Those fatal words that were to mean everything—and nothing—in the days to come.

"Moon Slave . . ."

FANTON'S place was a sturdy, clapboarded old New England house. It had several bedrooms, all fitted with Mother Fanton's comforters and patchwork quilts. Downstairs, there was a rugged, scrubbed kitchen with a pump

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at the end of the sink that brought water from the cistern, a dining room that often in the old days sat a dozen sea captains, a couple of small rooms that Nick and I used for summer offices, and the huge "sitting" room.

We were sitting in that last room now. Nick stretched across a big easy chair, his head hanging down over the arm, staring at the ceiling. Jean Fanton stood near the fireplace, where she had just placed a log on the flames and was brushing her hands on an old pair of blue corduroys. George Fanton, the father of Nick and Jean, sat by the window, staring out at the white capped bay.

"Now look here, Lee Judson," Jean said sharply, "you may as well stop brooding over something that you can't help, and snap out of it."

I looked up quickly and realized that I must be acting like a genuine sourpuss. I had let Rancin's death affect me pretty strongly, not so much because we were friends, but because of the strange reference he had made to the phantom girl of Cory Rock. I had said nothing to them about it, and the secret, or at least I considered it one, was getting the best of me. I stood up.

"Sorry," I said. "I came up here for two weeks of peace and rest. Feel like taking a walk?"

Jean crossed the room and stared up at me. I must admit that any memories of Rancin fled at that moment. Jean is one of those clean-featured, bronzed natives of the coast. Slight of figure, her brown eyes, chestnut hair and clever collection of curves, pack a terrific wallop. I, Lee Judson, was in the fortunate position of holding an option on this charm, and I had no intention of letting the option run out. We planned to get married just as soon as Uncle Sam could decide whether he needed me most in a law office or in a uniform. As most of my cases were rather important from the Navy's standpoint, I figured on a fifty-fifty chance of remaining before a jury box.

"Let's go out on the Point," Jean said. "The sun is so bright, we can probably see across to town."

Town, Rayford Village, lay five miles straight across the bay from Rigger's Point. It *was* a pretty sight on a clear day, but as we had just dragged Rancin's body out of the Bay last evening, the place didn't appeal to me.

I guess my expression must have indicated this, as she grabbed my arm hurriedly.

"All right, sour face," she said. "We'll take the road to town and come back past Evelyn Rancin's house. *Someone* has to cheer her up."

Her father cleared his throat hurriedly, and I knew he didn't approve of Evelyn Rancin. Few old timers did. Jean was ready with a come-back.

"You go back to sleep, you old seal," she said. "I'll take care of little Jean. Evelyn Rancin won't contaminate your pure daughter."

As this seemed to be the extent of the spirit of revolt, we left Nick staring at the flowered wallpaper on the ceiling and walked down to the road. We had gone half a mile along the dusty pike before I gained courage to tell Jean of Lawrence Rancin's reference to the *Moon Slave*.

When I had finished, she stared straight ahead for some time. Then, without looking directly at me, she said:

"Is that all he told you?"

I nodded.

"Ever hear the vision of Cory Rock called a *Moon Slave* before?" I asked, trying to sound bright and in a conversational mood.

She shook her head.

"Lee, did you know that Lawrence Rancin isn't the first man who has

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jumped from the Point?"

"I've heard of others," I said guardedly, "but I never knew them personally or saw them."

She slowed down a bit, talking quite earnestly.

"There have been seven in all," she said. "Over a period of nine years, seven young men have gone to their death from Rigger's Point. In each case, the old timers claimed that the man was trying to reach the vision he saw out there. It's—it's sort of a fairy tale, like the one about the seaman who wrecked their ships centuries ago, to follow sirens and mermaids. It gives me the shivers."

That was putting it mildly, and I started to gain a new respect for Jean's intelligence. She had thought more of Rancin's death than she confessed in public.

A BUGGY appeared on the road, coming in our direction. It was moving fast, sending spurts of dust into the air behind it. It could see the black frocked figure of Minister Niles standing up, hurrying his mare with quick, deft flicks of the whip.

We stepped from the road until he could pass, but he saw us and halted. There was perspiration on his face, and a cold, gray look of fear about his mouth.

"Judson, I'm glad you were coming to town."

I held the mare while he climbed down, and said "hello" to Jean. Then he turned once more to me.

"Judson," he said again, "you said that Rancin made a specific request that he be buried by moonlight, and on the night of his death?"

I nodded, wondering what he was leading up to. He said no more, staring first at Jean and then myself. Finally he swallowed.

"I don't understand it, Jerusalem, but I don't."

Jerusalem was Minister Nile's closest approach to a curse and he used it only when over-excited or badly confused.

"Just what don't you understand, Mr. Niles?" Jean asked. "Don't keep us in the dark."

"Last night," Niles said, "after we left the graveyard, Sam Peevis went back past it on his way home. Sam may have been drunk, because someone gave him money and he spent an hour at the tavern."

He looked accusingly at me, but I didn't betray where the money had come from.

"Sam says he saw a woman in the graveyard. He saw her hair and it was down about her neck, so unless he was drunk, he couldn't have been mistaken."

"Why all the excitement over Peevis' story?" I asked a little angrily. "Perhaps Evelyn Rancin went there herself, to grieve at the grave of her husband."

Niles' face grew grim.

"If she did," he said, "she's in trouble. This morning when Sam went over to remove the funeral equipment, the grave was open."

His breathing was hard.

"Lawrence Rancin's body is missing."

I could think of nothing to say. I wished that Jean wasn't there. That she hadn't heard what was said.

"Gone?"

She mumbled that one word, as though in a trance. Her face was cleansed of all color.

Niles nodded vigorously.

"The coffin was open. Nothing in it but the carnation Evelyn had put in his button-hole."

"I think I better go back to town with you," I said. "Jean, will you go back to the house and wait?"

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She answered me by climbing into the buggy.

"You and I started out together," she said quietly, "and I'm not going back alone."

There was nothing to be gained by argument now. I held the mare while Niles climbed in stiffly beside Jean. Then I took the reins and guided the buggy in a U-turn. It was after we turned and were well on the way to town that I saw it. Saw Jean's hands, resting together on her lap. The nails were long and usually wore a deep, red polish.

Now they were cleansed of polish, and under the tips was black, rich dirt.

I tried to keep my eyes on the road, but a strange premonition of danger swept over me.

Jean hadn't gone to the funeral last night. She said she went to her room early. The corduroy trousers which were worn in the garden, and on our many hikes, were smootched with the soil of Rigger's Point.

I swore softly at myself for doing it, but I couldn't prevent my eyes from straying to those pants, studying them carefully.

Below the right knee, a line of dark dirt impregnated the corduroy fabric. *Dirt that was never found at Rigger's Point.*

A fear grew inside me. A fear for my own sanity.

Once more I looked at the fingernails. Then I brought the whip down sharply on Minister Niles' mare. The sudden, savage gesture startled them both, as I was usually gentle with animals.

"Lee," Jean said sharply. "What's wrong with you?"

"I was just wondering," I said, "if there is any connection between Lawrence Rancin's request to be buried at night, and the *Moon Slave* on Cory Rock."

Neither of them answered, and it was a silent, bewildered little group that continued to ride hurriedly toward Rayford Village.

When I looked again, Jean's hands were thrust deep into the pockets of her trousers.

I wondered if those hands had dug into the soft, death-filled earth of Rayford Graveyard.

WE ACCOMPLISHED nothing that day. The entire village of Rayford was stirred to hysteria by the mysteriously robbed grave. Men, already sworn in as special deputies, were roving the countryside looking for some trace of the body, or a trail left by the ghoul. Someone notified Nick Fanton, and he came in early in the afternoon, threatened Jean with sudden death if she did not return home, and joined the search at my side.

The search was foolish and we knew it. Whoever stole Lawrence Rancin's body did it with a clear-cut purpose in mind. It wasn't likely that the ghoul would drop the corpse behind some bush or along a lonely path. Still, the task of searching out every nook and cranny provided the townspeople with some outlet for their emotions.

Evening came, and Nick and myself returned to the town tavern to refresh ourselves after a hot afternoon. We learned from Minister Niles that Evelyn Rancin had been notified. In fact, the minister himself had made a discreet search of the Rancin house; not, he assured us, in a suspicious manner. He had just "looked around" without arousing Evelyn's suspicions. Evelyn was quite the most shocked person alive, he said, and he could place none of the guilt upon her shoulders.

I was thinking of this when Nick and I sat at the scarred oak table near the

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rear of Barr's Tavern. It seemed evident, almost shockingly evident to me, that Jean must in some manner be involved. It could have been she who was seen last night. After Nick and I returned from the burial, Jean did not appear. I had seen her again this morning, and at that time, rich dirt was still visible under her nails. It wasn't like Jean to be careless or slovenly in the care of her body. Perhaps she was still under a terrific strain. . . .

I wonder why suspicion should grow so swiftly against a person you hold closer than any other in the world? Sometimes that is so. You want so completely to trust them, and yet they are the first to be condemned if anything goes wrong.

I knew that Evelyn and Jean were old friends. Evelyn Rancin was a little wild, and she paid no attention to tongue-waggling in the village. Rayford is a quiet place and it was always picking on the one or two "fast" women, who are supposed to be bad medicine for anyone else to associate with. Perhaps Evelyn Rancin wasn't as bad as she was pictured, but the elderly members of Rayford Village drew a scarlet circle around her and wouldn't venture inside with anything but their gossiping tongues.

I wondered what Jean's habits were, when I wasn't at Rayford. It had been three weeks since I last journeyed up from New York.

"Nick," I said suddenly. "What's your idea about all this?"

Nick Fanton, Jean's younger brother, is a curly-headed, handsome loafer with a spark of genius in him and lights to a flame any time he really applies himself to hard work. He seldom does it, but when money is scarce in the Fanton home, Nick goes to work on some new idea and puts the family on easy street. Nick thinks as he talks—slowly, and only when necessary. He finished sipping his glass of ale, placed the empty glass on the table and leaned back in his chair.

"I've got sore feet from hiking over every by-way within five miles of town," he said. "Why don't we stop kidding ourselves? Why don't we do a little grave digging of our own?"

I'LL admit that the suggestion, given casually, caught me entirely off guard. Nick wasn't anyone's fool, and he had approached the problem much as I had.

"You think there might be some connection between last night's episode and the others?"

He didn't answer directly. He stared straight into my eyes, and for the first time in a month, he looked sober, deadly serious.

"Don't you?"

I nodded.

"Rancin asked to be buried at once, the very night he died," I said. "I don't know what happened to the other men who died in the sea because of the vision of Cory Rock, but I'd like to find out."

He nodded and stood up.

"Come on," he said.

I remembered Jean's discussion. Remembered that seven men had died near Cory Rock. I followed Nick into the street and we walked swiftly toward the edge of town, up toward the graveyard. I said:

"Nick—who was the last victim, before Lawrence Rancin died?"

"Fred Fletcher," he answered. "Fletcher was a pal of mine. He used to sit out there on the Point every night, staring out to sea. I told him to stay away. He laughed and said he was interested in the vision of the girl only from a scientific point of view. Wondered what caused the phenomenon."

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"Well?"

He was still walking steadily but I managed to catch up to him and take my place at his side. I could see that his face was very red. Anger stirred deep within Nick Fanton that night.

"He was a damned liar," he said abruptly. "Fletcher was in love with that vision. One night she must have called, for he stood up and jumped a hundred feet to his death against the rocks. I helped carry what was left up the path to town."

We were beyond the last house now, and Sam Peevis' place stood dim and black, far ahead. We reached the dark, neat square of Peevis' house and Nick knocked sharply on the door. Several seconds passed and a lamp flickered and grew strong on the kitchen table. Sam came to the door in his night shirt.

"I've got a job for you, Sam," Nick said. "It calls for some night work, and a little extra cash in your pockets."

Sam stood very still, holding the lamp high, studying us. He shrugged.

"Rayford is a pretty healthy place these days," he said. "Not many dead 'uns to tuck in. I can use the money. Hold on a jiffy."

We waited while he went back inside and shuffled around the room. Then he came out, picked up a heavy spade that stood by the door and started toward the gate.

He seemed to know what he was wanted for, and yet we hadn't mentioned anything to him. I looked at Nick. Nick grinned back at me and winked.

"I guess Sam isn't the strictly upright citizen we sometimes think," he said and followed the grave digger across the yard and in among the graves.

We had gone perhaps twenty yards when Sam Peevis stopped and turned around to wait.

"Which 'un we diggin' up?" he asked casually.

That was a little too much for me to take straight. This was a new business to me, and not an entirely pleasant one. I'm old fashioned enough to feel a certain horror in disturbing the remains of the dead.

"Look here," I said a little sharply. "What makes you think—?"

"Stow it," Nick Fanton said sharply. "He knows what we're after and there's no use concealing it. Sam, we want to see the inside of Fred Fletcher's coffin. We were both a little surprised that you were ready to go graveyard sightseeing. Isn't this idea rather novel, or do you make a habit of such midnight visits?"

Sam Peevis grinned.

"They's no accounting for tastes," he said. "For me, ale wets my tongue and my conscience. If the pay is good, any job is easy."

I wasn't satisfied, and I was a little disgusted with Nick Fanton's approach to the problem.

At least, we were accomplishing something and that was what we came here for.

SAM PEEVIS found Fletcher's grave easily, and though the grass was beginning to choke the headstone, after cutting the sod away carefully, he worked swiftly downward until his spade hit the top of the casket. The graveyard was dark tonight, and the moon didn't shine. Somehow I was thankful for that, although the shadows weren't exactly reassuring. I had grown to hate the moon, and regard it as a huge, staring eye of death. I welcomed its absence.

I heard Sam Peevis grunting and swearing over the casket, and at last the wrenching, hollow sound as the lid came loose. Nick Fanton stepped to the edge of the grave and shot the spot of

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his flashlight downward. He didn't speak, but I heard him take a quick, hard breath. Sam Peevis was climbing clumsily out of the grave. Nick turned to me.

He handed me the light and without a word, waited for me to look. I took a deep breath and stepped to a vantage point where I could look down at what lay below. I pressed the switch on the flashlight.

"Damn . . . "

I heard Nick at my side. We were both silent after that. We were right. The coffin, its white satin interior dulled and spotted with age, was empty. There was no sign that the body of a man had ever disturbed the smooth cushions.

"Peevis," Nick said.

Peevis had climbed entirely out of the grave now and stood away from us, his mouth foolishly open, staring in our direction. At the sound of Nick's voice, he stepped toward us eagerly.

"Look here, you two," he said. "I don't know what you're up to. I ain't never dug up no grave like that before. Sometimes I stole rings and things outa them for people, but stiffs can't use rings anyhow. I never stole no bodies."

His voice was alarmingly high-pitched and frightened.

We had placed ourselves in a bad spot. If anyone should come this way and discover us over an empty grave, we would be in a position that no amount of explaining could get us out of.

Nick Fanton was thinking quickly, and I guess a little more clearly than I.

"We're getting out of here," he said. "When we're gone, you make sure that our footsteps and your own are covered. Then you go home and leave the grave open. Keep your mouth shut and we'll all be safe; open it and I'll put you on the spot that won't be healthy for your peace of mind, understand?"

Sam Peevis wasn't too intelligent, but he recognized a bad spot when he was in it. He probably reasoned as we did. An empty grave had been found this morning and it hadn't been blamed on him. Therefore, why should he spend sleepless hours over this one.

"Give me my money," he said gruffly. "I'll do like you say."

The transaction was made hurriedly and we left him there in the darkness, muttering to himself and scrapping fresh dirt over our deeply imprinted shoe marks.

On the road, we avoided the village and went straight up the Bay pike toward home. Neither of us spoke for a long time. We were wondering if all those seven graves had been robbed. If every man who died for the Moon Slave had deserted his grave for some mysterious mission.

THE more I think about it," Nick Fanton said savagely, "the more I'm inclined to blame the whole damned business on Evelyn Rancin."

Together we had left the house early in the morning, detoured from the road through the swamp that surrounded the Rancin place, and were now seated in an open glade, the sun beating warmly upon us, our backs pressed to a pair of dwarfed cedars.

There was no doubt in our minds that by this time the second empty grave had been discovered. Whoever was responsible, would be on guard from now on. We had to strike soon, and strike before we ourselves were in danger.

"Evelyn could easily be responsible," I agreed. "But why should she have murdered her own husband? Larry wasn't any God's gift to women, but he thought a lot of Evelyn in his own way. He'd have killed himself if she asked such a sacrifice of him."

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Nick nodded.

"I know," he admitted. "Yet Evelyn has had a mysterious, will-o-the-wisp reputation since she came here. No one ever sees her come and go."

He stopped abruptly, and stared at me.

"Lee," he asked almost wistfully. "Have you ever seen the vision of Cory Rock?"

The question gave me a start. Nick was usually such a matter of fact person. I knew from the way he spoke that he had not only seen the Moon Slave, but had been as captivated by her as I was.

"Yes," I admitted slowly. "I heard so much about her that one night I sat on the point above the cliff and waited for her. It was stormy, but after a while the moon came out and there she was, sitting out there on a ledge, above the waves. Water broke over her but she didn't seem to notice it. She was the most perfect creature I've ever seen."

He seemed to be thinking. At last he nodded, as though answering his own question.

"Doesn't it strike you odd that a woman could possibly swim that wild stretch of water between the rock and the beach under the cliff? That's one of the most treacherous death holes along the entire coast."

I was aware of that. I had often wondered. Still, Evelyn Rancin had lived along the coast all her life. She had taken medals at every swimming meet held at the village.

A lump arose in my throat as I remembered that Jean had competed in those swimming meets also. That Jean's slim form could cut the water, smooth or rough, with an easy breast stroke that defied description.

Nick was still waiting for me to answer.

"Are we sure that this is a woman," I asked. "Couldn't it be some weird devilish phenomenon of the sea that has no existence in fact?"

"You forget," he said dryly, "that men are missing from their graves. *That* was no trick of the eye."

He stood up.

"We are going to see Evelyn Rancin," he said. "I think she has some answers that will prove interesting."

EVELYN RANCIN had refused to leave the low, stone house when her husband was buried. She had locked the oak doors and burned a candle in the window, as though hoping that some trick of fate would bring him home. Her eyes were dry when she greeted us at the door, but I knew that she was badly shaken.

"Nick—Lee," she said. "Come in. I've been wondering when someone would come over." She shuddered. "Someone human, that is."

I remembered Minister Niles' visit of the day before, and knew how badly she hated the stiff, sanctimonious old man.

We went in and Nick draped himself over an easy chair in the small, warmly decorated parlor. I sat down on the piano bench and Evelyn sat opposite me. She reached out and touched my hand.

"Lee," she said. "I guess I was a fool not to come for the funeral. Since Larry's body has been missing, they all point at me as though I stole it myself."

Her fingers touched the back of my hand. I looked into her eyes. They were brown and deep and moist, and I realized that the feeling I had had for her years ago still lived somewhere down deep inside. She might be frightened and stirred badly by what had happened. It didn't erase entirely the smoothness of her poise. Evelyn Ran-

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cin still had the power to make men curl up inside and feel grateful for being allowed to share her emotions.

"Matter of fact," Nick Fanton said slowly. "We came over to talk about the body. You *didn't* steal it, did you?"

Evelyn's hand darted away from mine and for a moment, touched the bodice of her gown above her heart. Then she clasped both hands in her lap. Her face turned very pale.

"That wasn't exactly a clever thing to say, Nick," I said. "We've been Evelyn's friends for a long time. There's no point in making it tougher for her now."

He sat up in the chair, a rather cruel smile on his lips.

"Why beat around the bush?" he asked. "If Evelyn is innocent, she shouldn't feel hurt."

Evelyn Rancin stood up. Suddenly her eyes were blazing with anger, and I didn't blame her.

"You get the hell out of here, Nick Fanton!" she said wildly. "I've taken it from every direction. I might have known you'd be no different."

Nick stood up lazily. He tossed his head, sending a stray curl back into place. He stared toward the door.

"You coming, Lee?" he asked.

I didn't like the ugly implication in his voice. My fists were clenched at my sides.

"No," I said. "I'm staying. I came to talk with Evelyn Rancin, not to crucify her."

He stopped at the door, and turned to grin at us.

"Plenty of time for that, after we find out the truth about her," he said. "Have a good time, you two."

Before I could rise to go after him for that remark, I felt Evelyn's hand on my arm, holding me back.

"Let him go." Her voice was low. "He's a beast. You can't change him."

I HUNG around Rancin's place for half an hour, and spent most of it apologizing for Nick. I knew that he was excited about our findings and didn't entirely blame him for blowing up. Perhaps it did look bad, my fighting in Evelyn Rancin's defense, when I was engaged to marry Nick's sister.

Somehow I couldn't picture the pleasant, rambling house as a hiding place for corpses. I chose to believe that Evelyn was a good kid at heart, and resented intruders even as I did. Anyhow, the visit ended pleasantly enough and I started across the swamp toward Rigger's Bay feeling that we would have to search further for the secret to the empty graves.

It was nearly noon, and I stopped along the way to strip several bushes of huckleberries. I took my time, and before I realized it, the sun was dropping and the swamp was growing cool and moist with evening winds. The pounding of the sea told me that I must be half a mile below Rigger's Point and probably close to the cliff that looked out upon Cory Rock. I started to move more swiftly. The sun was gone before I reached the road.

I wanted to turn and follow it home. I was both mentally and physically exhausted. I couldn't escape the magnetic pull that the cliff had for me. Here, or at least within this unholy mile, seven men had died in an attempt to reach the vision of Cory Rock, Lawrence Rancin's Moon Slave.

I crossed the road and started to climb slowly over the huge boulders that had been thrown up by the angry sea during centuries that man knew nothing of. The sea was wild tonight, and clouds scudded across the sky, leaving the moon clear and yellow, then hiding it completely from sight. I moved slowly, staying close to the shore and working my way upward to where Rig-

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ger's Point sends its jutting, granite face far out over the water.

Almost to the top of the cliff, I stopped suddenly, my heart pounding with excitement. Something white flashed momentarily, then disappeared below the top of the boulders. I waited, straining my eyes, trying to see it once more.

There was a woman out there, close to the edge of the sea, working parallel with me toward the top of the cliff. Slowly, cautiously, I moved toward her. Now I could see her clearly. Although the night was too dark for me to recognize her, the occasional flashes of moonlight revealed that her hair hung to her shoulders and was blowing wildly in the night wind. She seemed clad in a white bathing suit, or perhaps she was entirely unclothed.

We had both reached the cliff top now, and I saw that she was staring out toward the sea. Staring straight at the high bulwark of Cory Rock. The rock was far below, and nearly two hundred yards from the shore. I tried to secure a vantage point where I could see what she was looking at.

It was impossible.

Below us, the water was deep and it sulked off shore for suspended seconds to crash in against the cliff with terrific force. The moon was overhead now, a huge, baleful eye staring down at us. She turned toward me for an instant and the outline of her face was crystal clear.

It was Jean Fanton.

Almost before I could realize what she had planned to do, she turned and was leaning over the precipice. I heard the water crash against the cliff, then roll out again. My heart jumped into my throat and I cried out quickly in alarm.

"Jean—Jean, for God's sake!"

I was too late.

SHE spread her arms aloft and dove cleanly downward toward the surface of the sea. I ran toward the spot where she had stood, and leaning far over, tried to see where she hit the water.

The moon was in league with her now, for suddenly it vanished behind low flying clouds and I could see nothing ten feet below the edge of the cliff. I waited for seconds, minutes, for her to cry out. No sound came from below. The sea gathered itself up once more and lashed in furiously, battering at the cliff.

I couldn't help Jean Fanton now. My worst fears were realized. There was no doubt in my mind who the Moon Slave was, though why Larry Rancin had called her by that strange name, I couldn't guess.

I turned and went swiftly toward the house. I saw a light burning in Nick's room, and entered the darkened living room with as little noise as possible. I was afraid to awaken Jean's father, so I removed my shoes and went silently upstairs. Nick's room was at the end of the corridor, looking out over the Bay. I waited at the door, then knocked lightly. There was no answer.

I knocked again, then touched the door with my hand and it swung open without a sound. I looked in.

Nick wasn't there. The bed had not been slept in. I was about to turn and leave when a sparkling bauble on the floor caught my attention. It was just inside, partly hidden in the carpet.

I started to close the door, but something about that object fascinated and horrified me at once. I bent over and picked it up. It lay in my hand, a sparkling, glasslike bit of stuff shaped like a crescent half-moon.

It was like one of the glittering little objects that I had seen before, flashing from the waist of the Moon Slave.

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Did Nick Fanton know his sister was the Moon Slave? Was he trying to protect her by throwing the guilt upon Evelyn Rancin?

The outside door down stairs opened and closed softly. I hurried into the hall and toward my own bedroom. I left the door open a crack after I entered. I stood there, not turning on the light, wondering who would come up the stairs.

I expected to see Nick, and when Jean came up, clothed in her aged corduroys and faded blue shirt, it threw me off guard. I was so overjoyed to see her alive after the incident at the cliff, that I lost my sense of caution. Throwing the door wide open, I ran toward her.

In an instant she was in my arms, her soft hair against my shoulder, crying as though her heart had been broken.

"Lee . . . Lee, call father. Do something. Nick fell over the cliff and I can't find him. Lee, I think Nick's dead like the others."

A hatred welled up inside of me. A hatred not for Jean, but for the thing she represented to me. I pushed her away from me suddenly, wanting to strike her down.

I had seen her out on the cliff alone. Nick hadn't been there then. I had hoped to prevent any more men from following unlucky Larry Rancin's trail to death.

Now Jean Fanton, the woman I worshipped, had enticed her own brother to his death.

I watched her sink to the floor at my feet, her head buried in her arms. Sobs shook her body. Her long, dark hair was fanned out on the carpet, wet with sea water.

"Jean," I said, "get up on your feet. Tell me what you've done."

She didn't answer at once. Then, sobbing pitifully, she lifted her head and stared up at me.

"I didn't mean to do it, Lee. God knows I didn't mean to do it. Nick's dead and I killed him. I . . ."

She saw my eyes and read what was in them. Her head sank to the floor again and the sound of her crying mingled with the steady, heartless pounding of the sea.

The phone downstairs was in the hall, near the front door. I stepped past her and walked down mechanically, wishing it had been me instead of foolish, headstrong Nick Fanton.

WE COULDN'T locate Nick Fanton's body. Men came from town that night and for some reason unknown to myself, I lied, refusing to implicate Jean in the killing of her brother. Her light was on when the searching party came back from the cliff. We asked her to come down to the living room and when she appeared, I was struck by the change that had come over her.

She was fully composed now, and dressed carefully in what I had always chosen to call her "Sunday gown." She seemed to realize that I had protected her, and she answered Minister Niles and Sheriff Beasley calmly. She told how she had followed Nick to the cliff and tried to prevent him from jumping into the sea.

Then they were gone, with the promise to send up the coast guard in the morning to make a thorough search for the missing body. Old George Fanton stood up well under the strain of the night's events, and after the others had left for town, the three of us sat in the living room, no one wanting to talk, no one wanting to go to bed.

There was fear in all of us now. I knew that I couldn't protect Jean forever. I'm afraid George may have suspected but he demanded nothing from

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his children and waited for Jean to tell him what she wished him to know. As for Jean, she sat curled up in a despondent little bundle before the fire, staring at the flames and asking nothing from us but to be left alone.

An hour passed and the storm clouds vanished. The moon was clear now, hanging out over the bay in an almost perfect sphere. I went to the window and stared up at the sky. I heard Jean stir, then rise from her place before the fireplace.

"Lee," she said. "I want you to go with me. I have something to tell you and something you must see."

"I don't care to go out," I said. I wasn't angry. I didn't have any anger left in me. I was all washed out and replaced by a sick, down at the heel feeling, as though the world had ended and I was left out in space.

She came to my side and put her hand on my arm.

"Lee," she said again, "You're trying to be noble and you're quite well satisfied with yourself, because you think you're protecting me. I insist that you go with me."

I shrugged. What harm could she do now? If she planned to get me out of the way, what difference would it make?

A strange, desperate loneliness came over me. I'm not emotionally high strung, but all that had happened had not deadened my love for her. To me, regardless of what strange powers held sway over Jean Fanton's mind, I couldn't go on without her.

I turned swiftly and swept her into my arms.

"Jean, I don't give a damn what you've done. I don't care what you do. I can't hate you. I—I . . ."

She struggled gently to push me away and when we were separated, her face was quite cold and emotionless.

"Then you'll go with me?"

"Where?"

"To Evelyn Rancin's," she said.

THE swamp was lonely and cold. We crossed it, not daring to speak to each other until we were in sight of the Rancin place. Then Jean stopped.

"Promise to say nothing," she said. "You must let me talk It's the only way I have to show you what you must see."

I promised and we went on. She knocked at the door. There was no answer. I went around the house, looking into the rooms that were lighted, then knocked at the back door. Still no response came from within. I knocked again, and heard footsteps inside.

The door opened and Jean slipped out.

"The front door was unlocked," she said. Her voice was filled with a new excitement. There was an undercurrent of fright that I had not expected. "I've looked in every room. Evelyn has gone. We'll have to hurry."

I didn't question her. She started backed across the swamp and I stumbled after her as she moved swiftly ahead of me. She was familiar with every path and every pit in the weird place. We reached the road. Across it were the same granite boulders among which I had made my way earlier that same night.

It dawned on me that perhaps the trip to Rancin's was to throw me off guard. I alone knew Jean's secret. Was she leading me to my own death at the top of the cliff?

She went on, upward through the stone field, and stopped only when we had reached the crest of the cliff. She turned to me almost savagely.

"Lee Judson," she said. "If you're a coward, this is the time to turn back."

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I waited without speaking, listening to the sea far below and remembering how she had dived from this spot and had come back to the house alive and unscratched.

"You used to swim with me at the village," she said. "You took diving at college. Lee, will you go over the cliff with me?"

I tried to smile, but I'm afraid my face was pretty chalky. It wasn't fear—that is, not fear of death. I feared now that I would lose her. As much as I hated what she represented, I couldn't feel that she would destroy me as she had the others.

"If you can think of any easier way to commit suicide," I said, "I'd rather."

"It's a long drop," she was talking as though she hadn't even heard my protest. "The waves come in hard, then as they go out, the water is calm for a few seconds. You have to hit the water when it's calm, and hit clean. There's a forty foot depth just at that time, and you won't land on the rocks."

I took her wrist in my hand and squeezed it tightly.

"I'm game," I said, "so long as you're going with me."

Her answer was a quick step toward the edge of the cliff. The waves struck with sudden fury, then retreated. The surface of the water was calm and the moon made it look like spreading quicksilver. She leaned forward and dived cleanly. I waited, as she hit the dark water and watched the circle widen where she disappeared. Then a tiny brown head bobbed on the surface.

I kicked off my shoes, waited for the next wave to subside and followed her with the best dive I'd ever done in or out of college. It was a good one, and I felt fairly safe during the moment before I hit the water. Then I was holding my breath and sliding down and down. I came up sputtering and fighting for breath. Jean had reached the rocks and was standing on a low ledge against the cliff. A wave caught me and threw me after her. I hit hard, but luckily I had my second breath and was able to hold out. Her hands grasped mine and she drew me out of the water.

What was to happen? She had her chance to kill me, and she had let me live. For some more terrible fate?

"Stay close to the cliff. When the waves come in, grab the rock and hold on. Follow me.

I knew she had been here before, for she followed the narrow ledge along the base of the cliff as though it were a wide path. I was behind her, choking and fighting as the waves tried to tear me away.

Where the ledge fell away to leave only smooth, polished rock, she stopped again.

"Take my hand," she said. "We'll dive together. Take a good breath. It's a long way under."

NOW it had come. She would swim with me under the edge of the cliff, then a sudden push against a familiar hidden rock, perhaps a deadly whirlpool. I didn't give a damn. Most of the strength had been knocked out of me. I breathed a deep breath, took a firm hold on her wrist and jumped into the water.

Jean is a fine underwater swimmer, and I stayed with her easily, following while she guarded me deep under water, then suddenly back toward the face of the cliff. Her wrist was strong under the touch of my fingers. She swam with her right arm. Down here, the water was calm and without motion. Staring ahead, I saw a small opening under the cliff and knew where we were going. We entered the tunnel and though my lungs felt as though they were ready to burst, I held out, waiting for her to go

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to the surface.

I concentrated on her, watching the slender bronze arms and legs work smoothly under her drenched dress. Then there was light ahead—a dim blue light. We shot upward.

She touched my shoulder gently just before we reached the surface and pressed her hand to her mouth. It was a signal for me to come up slowly and to be quiet.

Then my head was out of water and we were both close to the edge of a circular pool of water. A stone outcoping hid us from the cave above, and the same strange blue light filled the place. I heard a voice say:

"O Moon—O Slave of the Moon—this is another wonderful night."

The voice was harsh and I couldn't tell whether the words were spoken by a man or woman. Then, with the water cleared from my eyes I saw Evelyn Rancin.

She had come to the far side of the pool and was standing there, her dress soaked with water, her arms hanging despondently at her sides. I had never seen such sadness on the features or in the eyes of a living person.

She saw us and her voice rose in a scream of fear.

"Look—there in the pool!"

I was so startled that I didn't think very clearly. I grasped the edge of the rock and drew myself up, throwing my body on the floor of the cave. With my eyes still on her, I sprang to my feet and started to sprint around the edge of the pool. I heard Jean cry out and knew that she was trying to follow.

"Lee—be careful! Behind you!"

I turned, but I was too late. I saw seven men sitting stiffly around the circular cavern.

Seven dead men.

They looked alive, for they were seated on carved, black stone chairs. Yet, I had seen two of them buried and knew the others for the victims of the Moon Slave. All this happened in an instant. Then a face loomed up before me and a club descended against my skull. I went down, fighting to keep a foothold on the slippery rocks. Then I knew the face behind that club.

I was staring straight into deep, satanic eyes of Nick Fanton.

I heard a far away voice. It was a deep, almost reverent voice, repeating mechanically a sentence that drove fear into my brain.

"Victim of the Moon Slave. By the power of the moon that controls the sea, and the sea that controls man, open now your eyes. Victim of the Moon Slave. . . ."

I OPENED my eyes slowly, and felt my body thrust into an upright position. My arms were placed on what felt like slimy, cold arms of a chair. Then the haze before my eyes cleared and I knew with certain horror that I had been placed on a seat of honor in the very center of the ring of dead men.

Was I alive or dead?

Had I died as I fell and was I under the death spell of that voice? No, I felt warm blood pumping once more into my veins and realized that, fortunately for me, I had appeared dead a moment ago. I sat rigidly, trying not to blink, staring straight at Nick Fanton. He was before me dressed only in white shorts with a mass of tiny half moons hanging from his hair. More of them were sewed around the shorts. His tanned body glistened in the blue light of the cave, and for the first time, I realized what it is like to stare into the deep set eyes of a madman.

He turned away and I had a chance to blink rapidly and to stare around at the cavern. Evelyn Rancin was still standing by the pool waiting for God

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knows what. Jean was on the floor. Her wrists and ankles were bound with bits of my trousers. She stared at me looking for some sign that I was living. If she saw me blink, she didn't betray me.

"Nick," she said. "Nick, please go away. Don't stay here. They'll find you sooner or later."

He walked toward her. He kicked her in the side and watched as she buried her face in her arms and cried.

"You're a fool," he said savagely. "Evelyn was a fool also. Love has no place on the throne of power. Love for a sister or for any woman."

He looked across the cave at Evelyn Rancin.

"Go on, fool," Nick shouted at her. "You said you were going to end your life. Jump into the pool and drown, and good riddance to you."

He turned to me and I became rigid again, trying to act as dead as the corpses around me.

"Welcome to the Moon Circle, Lee Judson," he said softly. "You didn't suspect Nick of robbing those graves did you? You didn't know that the vision of loveliness that dragged men from their graves was no vision at all, but Nick Fanton. No earth woman could swim that torrent to Cory Rock. Not even Nick Fanton, agent of the Moon Slave, could swim it, not until tonight."

Jean cried out.

"Nick—no, Nick, you can't swim it. You'll drown."

I was trying to control myself now. I must learn the truth before I sprang from that death chair and throttled Nick Fanton for what he had done. But he was talking smoothly, confidently.

"You are dead, Lee Judson. Ready for the sacrifice to the Moon Slave. You know little of the Moon Slave, Lee. She came to me in a dream one night."

" 'Nick Fanton,' she said. 'The Moon Slave demands ten men. Ten strong men—dead and brought to her beneath the cliff. You know the place, Nick Fanton. Bring those ten men, and as your reward, you will be able to swim to the rock. Swim into the arms of the Moon Slave.' "

He paused, and his breath was coming hard.

"Jean had to interfere, didn't she, Lee? She followed Evelyn to the graveyard that night, because Evelyn knew my secret. Evelyn loved me, and she didn't dare to tell Lawrence. Jean knew my secret and was trying to save me from myself."

He whirled on his sister.

"You're wrong," he said, "in trying to cheat me of my sublime reward. You and Evelyn reached the grave too late. You pleaded with Evelyn not to tell anyone what she knew about me. You both decided to save me. All the time, I didn't want either of you. I didn't want you, understand?"

He was screaming and his voice filled the cavern with furious sound.

"Now I have ten dead men. Tonight I swim to Cory Rock and claim the Moon Slave as my reward. I leave ten strong men here. Dead men to fulfill the contract to the moon and the sea and the Moon Slave. First I have to perform one duty to make sure no one returns to the village to tell my story. I may want to return myself some day, when I have tired of the prize I find on Cory Rock."

I had heard enough then, and inside me was the strength of a man who suddenly has all of his problems settled. He started to turn toward me and I lashed out with both feet. The blow sent him toppling backward and before he could regain his feet, I was after him, slipping and sliding across the cave. I went down hard, my knee in

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his stomach and felt the breath go out of him.

He struggled, gripping my throat with both hands. I tried to get away, but slowly, very slowly, he turned until I slipped and he was above battering my head against the stone floor.

He struck me twice with all his strength and my mouth was bleeding badly. Not once was I afraid that he would kill me. There is a strength that comes into a man at a time like this. A strength beyond human understanding. I managed to lift my knee until it was against his chest. Then I lunged out with all my strength and his fingers slipped from my throat. He fell backward and his head struck sharply against one of the stone death chairs. The stiff corpse of Lawrence Rancin toppled forward and fell on Nick Fanton. Oddly, Rancin's body seemed to hold Fanton's inert figure against the floor.

I stood up, panting, and went to help Jean.

WE HAD Nick Fanton confined to a sanitarium at Bar Harbor. I went down quite often to see him, but he would never speak to me. Once he accused me bitterly of robbing him of his reward and taking away his Moon Slave. He was never violent again.

Jean and I were married that fall. Before the wedding, Evelyn Rancin, Jean and I were together for an evening, talking over what had occurred.

I had helped the authorities remove the bodies of the nine men from the under-cliff cavern. It wasn't a pleasant task. Now it was all over.

Evelyn told her story simply. She had been in love with Nick for several years and Jean knew it. They both decided that though Nick was headstrong and ready to run away with Evelyn at once, a divorce would have to be arranged. Jean and Evelyn suspected Nick, because he started acting so strangely whenever a man succumbed to the charms of the Moon Slave and died by diving from the cliff. Jean traced him to the under water cavern, but because he had not actually murdered these men himself, she couldn't make herself turn him over to the authorities.

They had seen Nick steal Larry Rancin's body, and yet they both continued to protect Nick. I understand that, though I'm not sure the authorities would have, if I told the full story.

Now that it's all over, there is one point that I never could clear up and I don't think it's within the power of man to do so. Nick Fanton was just an agent. He worked because, as some people would express it, he was an insane man following insane desires.

It went deeper than that. There *is* a Moon Slave of Cory Rock. I have seen her, and still see her when I feel strong enough to go to the cliff without fear of succumbing to her charms and diving to my death at her call. Men stay away from the cliff now, and to my knowledge, the Moon Slave has never visited anyone but Nick Fanton in his dreams.

Perhaps some day the power of the moon and the tides will work again in terrible unison. Perhaps that vision of loveliness and death will hover over the bed of a man and fill him with a desire that will drive him mad as it did Nick Fanton.

You can't control those things, or predict them.

The moon and the sea are powerful. They control people and events, and no man can explain the Moon Slave of Cory Rock any more than he can explain the patterns of the northern lights. Perhaps, like the rainbow of color that weaves itself into the northern sky, the Moon Slave of Cory Rock is not real at

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all, but only a pattern of extreme loveliness, reflected there by the moon.

Some lovers see romance in the face of the moon. Jean Fanton and I see death and destruction. We prefer to spend our evenings in the warm, friendly atmosphere of greater New York, and go to Rigger's Point only once a year, when we visit Jean's father and take boxes of new gowns and hats to Evelyn Rancin.

Evelyn is resigned to her place in life, and our visit is the one bright spot in her year. Her life is quiet and she makes regular trips to the grave of her husband. She sits for long hours at the very spot I stood that first moon-lit night and stared down at the grave of Lawrance Rancin, then up at the cool, unexcited eyes of the Moon Slave's bridegroom, Nick Fanton.

THE END

Vignettes OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Copernicus

To speak of astronomy without mentioning the name of Nicolas Copernicus is almost sacrilegious

NIKOLAUS KOPPERNIGK, Polish astronomer, was born on February 19, 1473, at Thorn in Prussian Poland. He became known as Copernicus when he attained eminence, according to the fashion of the day of Latinizing the names of learned men.

Little is known of his ancestry, but as his father was a reputable citizen of Bohemia, and his mother a sister of the bishop of Ermeland—a province of East Prussia that was ceded to Poland in 1466—it may be assumed that they were substantial people of the upper middle class, whose men took to the professions of arms, medicine, law or church, as inclination or opportunity afforded. His father died when the boy was ten years old, leaving him to the care of his uncle Lucas Watzelrode, bishop of Ermeland.

In his early youth Nikolaus received what was then regarded as an excellent education, namely, a thorough background in Greek and Latin and literature, and the fundamentals of mathematics. At the age of eighteen he was sent to the University of Cracow, the capital of Poland, where during three years he specialized in the higher mathematics and where he, incidentally, acquired some skill in painting.

In his 22nd year he went to Italy to perfect himself in languages, law, medicine and astronomy in the schools of Padua and Bologna. A decided inclination towards the last of these led him, in 1500—the Jubilee year—to go to Rome, and place himself under John Muller, who, at the time, and under the name of Regiomontanus, had been engaged by Pope Sixtus IV to revise the calendar. In recognition of the ability he exhibited, he was appointed in 1503 Professor of Mathematics at the University of Ferrara, where his main duties were to expound the Ptolemaic system of astronomy to his pupils. But after serving there for less than two years he resigned, returned to Thorn, took the examination for holy orders, was ordained, and accepted the canonry of Frauenberg under the bishopric of his uncle. There he remained for the balance of his life, a period of thirty-eight years, devoting his time in about equal parts to the duties of his office, to the gratuitous practice of the medical art among the poor of his parish and to the study of astronomy.

He never took orders, but acted continually as the representative of the chapter under harassing conditions, administrative and political; he was besides commissary of the diocese of Ermeland; his medical skill, always at the service of the poor, was frequently in demand by the rich; and he laid

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a scheme for the reform of the currency before the Diet of Graudenz in 1522. Yet he found time, amid these multifarious occupations to elaborate an entirely new system of astronomy, by the adoption of which man's outlook on the universe was fundamentally changed. At the end of twenty-five years, being then 58 years old, he had completed the Treatise which insured him fame. But shrinking from the controversies he felt it would cause, he deferred its publication for another twelve years, only then consenting to place it in the hands of the printer because he believed, and rightly so, the end of his life was close at hand. He died at the age of 70, a few hours after the first copy had been delivered to him.

THIS work, entitled "De Orbium Coelestium Revolutionibus," was dedicated to Pope Paul III. In it he set forth and maintained with a great diffusion of argument, some of which at the present time would be lightly regarded, the four following main themes:

1. That the earth was a sphere. Knowing nothing of the laws of gravitation as set forth a century and a half later by Newton, or those of motion as exemplified by the centrifugal and centripetal forces, Copernicus argued that the earth must be of such a shape, mainly because that was the one perfect solid, its surface without beginning and without end, and with all its parts in complete balance with each other.

2. That its orbit, as well as those of all the other members then known of the solar system, were circles, with the sun at their center, and that their motion therein was everywhere uniform in speed. This, he maintained, *must* be the case, because the circle, being the one perfect plane figure, was the only one that could account for observed periodicity. And for a like reason he held that the rate of motion for each must be uniform.

3. That the earth and the planets revolved on their axes. But again having no conception of the force of gravitation, he was unable to explain why the waters of the ocean and all loose bodies clung to them throughout their revolutions.

4. That the stars were at immense and varying distances from us.

On the foundation of these postulates, he explained the variation of the seasons, the movements of the planets, the phases of the moon, and the precession of the equinoxes. But his mathematical and observational equipment was not enough to enable him to do so with entire accuracy in all cases, and so, to account for some observed irregularities, he was compelled to fall back at times on one or more of the epicycles of Ptolemy.

Such in brief is one aspect of the life of a gentle, clean and unselfish man, of a thinker whose mind had grasped clearly certain verities, but was not always equal to the task of demonstrating them logically. His treatise, which is his monument, is therefore open to much criticism, but it should be considered in connection with the status of science of the time, and remembering that in his day all matters in nature calling for explanation must finally be squared with any and all statements in the Bible that directly or remotely touched the question at issue. If that was not possible, then the interpretation advanced must be considered erroneous, and subject to the condemnation of the Church. It seems certain that Copernicus had reached the conclusion that his eludications of the observed celestial phenomena could not be so squared.

That he was a man of great modesty, is made clear by the fact that at the outset of his thesis he disclaimed originality, by calling attention to that theory of the cosmos believed to have been taught by Pythagoras 2000 years previously, which held that the earth was a sphere revolving around a central source of light and heat, as also the sun, the moon, the planets then known, and the stars; which source, however, was itself invisible, because towards it the under side of the earth was always turned.

The place of Copernicus in history is that of the man who took the first step in medieval times in setting forth the idea that some kinds of knowledge may be acquired by other means than through the study of the Scriptures, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and the philosophies of the Ancients. In doing this he fairly earned the title of the Father of Modern Science, regardless of the many errors he made in his exposition of the Universe. Being unquestionably a devout and humble-minded man, as well as an officer in his church, his delay in giving publicity to his views until he believed himself to be on the verge of the grave, where he would be beyond the reach of those who could call on him to recant or suffer the consequences, may easily be understood, and condoned if thought necessary. We are not always required to proclaim our views from the house top. His epitaph, which he prepared himself, was thoroughly characteristic of the man that he portrayed.

"I do not ask the pardon accorded to Paul. I do not hope for the grace given to Peter. I beg only the favor which you have granted to the thief on the cross."

His book was condemned as heretical by Martin Luther, a contemporary, and in 1616 it was placed in the Index Expurgatorius by the Church of Rome.

BUY VICTORY BONDS

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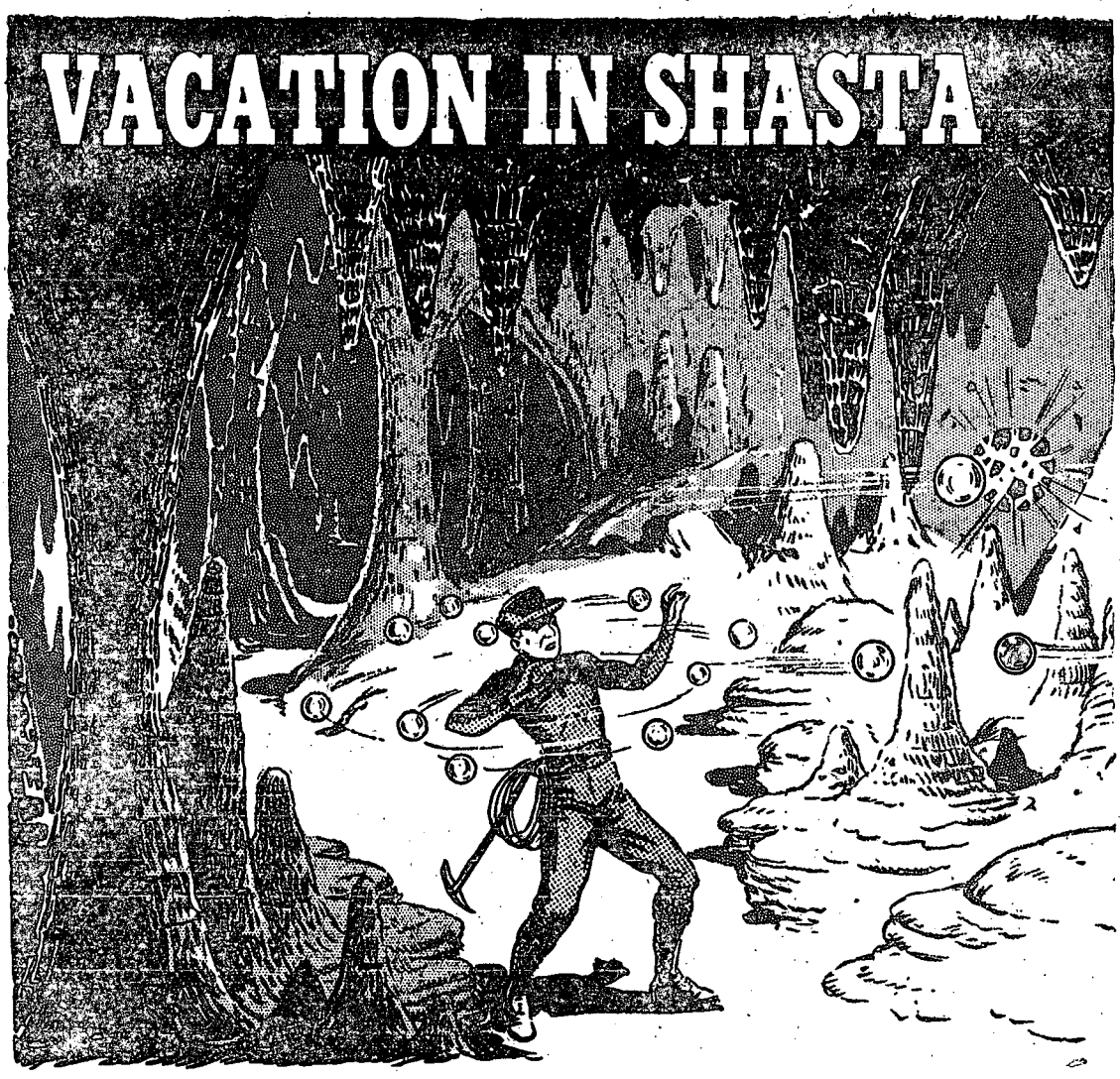
VACATION IN SHASTA



Over a cliff on Shasta he fell—and into a world of unearthly terror and death

THE path went steeply downward, numerous small rocks making walking a precarious occupation. Marg—that's my wife—was a few steps ahead of me. Her thirty-five-dollar hairdo looked really worth it with the sun reflecting from it in blonde cascades of light. And her seventy-five-dollar hiking outfit made her million-dollar figure look like a billion.

I'm a business man. Strictly business. When I start up a business it's got to have class. A million-dollar front. It's the same way with Marg. I've got to let people know that my business is good. So she dresses well. All the time. I don't look so bad myself. Jack Sloan's my name. Sloan's Neighborhood Markets. I own a pretty good slice of the government, too. Stockholder. Only

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Where a white sphere met a black one there was a blinding flash

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forty-one a month ago, and made it all myself except the first thirty thousand. Never mind how I got that.

This path wound down the side of the cliff, a narrow ledge, I guess, and the drop to the valley floor must have been at least three hundred feet. On Mt. Shasta. Maybe you have been over it yourself. I never get tired of looking at Marg. She enjoys that. Anyway, the next thing I had stepped on a round rock and my feet shot out from under me,—and the path too.

I dived off that path into space in the most perfect back flip I ever made. Not straight out or I would have missed the outcropping just below, but sort of back the way we came. So that I was almost sliding down the face of the cliff head first, if you see what I mean. I was trying to yell and climb back up and see where I was headed all at the same time.

Anyway, I saw the ledge just before I hit. It was like a small balcony in front of a second story window like some houses have, only of course, it was just like a natural stone foundation and no railing. I was lucky to fall where I did because the rest of the cliff below the path was smooth as a concrete highway. I put out my hands to break my fall, but was going too fast. I might have been able to have changed my landing into a harmless roll like I used to in high school if there had been any room to roll. There wasn't, though. I went out like a light. One minute I saw the ledge and struck out my hands like you do when you're going to hit the water. All these thoughts went through my mind in nothing flat. The next second I was in here just waking up. At least it seemed like the next second. And don't ask me where "in here" is because I don't know.

There must have been a tunnel opening where I lit and someone must have dragged me quite a way because there's not the slightest bit of light. It bothers me because I'm never sure whether my eyes are open or shut. I've been in here a long time now and it still bothers me.

To get on with the story, I guess I wasn't hurt much in the fall. I didn't even get a headache. I tried a few cautious moves with my arms and legs. Nothing seemed to be wrong so I stood up. I felt a little nauseated and was dizzy for a second. That passed, though.

Stretching out my arms in all directions around me I couldn't touch a wall anywhere. It scared me. Suddenly I thought I had it. The fall had blinded me and I was still on that ledge. The thought of being there, hundreds of feet up the cliff on a small ledge made me so dizzy I sat down again. My hands felt of the floor. I moved along slowly feeling my way over the floor until I reached the wall. Then I stood up, leaning against it and reached upward. Almost out of my reach the wall curved inward. I wasn't blind. At least maybe not. It was a cave. Believe me it was a relief to find I wasn't blind.

I SAT down to do a little thinking. Someone obviously had brought me here and had gone to get help. Maybe it was Marg. The thing to do was stay right where I was put until they came back. So I stayed there.

For perhaps an hour absolutely nothing happened. And I mean absolutely nothing. There wasn't the slightest sound. Not even the drip of water. Nor was there even the faintest trace of light. It was comfortably warm, and there was no breeze.

I felt in my pockets for a match and discovered I didn't have any. Since I don't smoke I very often forget to carry matches. So I just sat there in the darkness and quiet on the floor of

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the cave, alone in the universe with my thoughts.

Suddenly my thoughts were brushed aside by the forceful odor of a sweating body. The smell you get when you are wrestling with a guy and have your nose next to his sweaty skin. Only this odor was about ten times as strong. And just as suddenly the smell vanished. Then it came back faintly, and the queerest thoughts coursed through my mind. "I must be very quiet. I must move cautiously. Maybe I could suddenly bite a mouthful of this man sitting ahead of me and run away before he could hurt me."

Believe me, I never had such thoughts in my life. I had heard of cannibals, of course. Who hasn't? But to smell a man and enjoy the odor like you do that of a sizzling steak,—ugh! I was certainly disgusted with myself.

There came suddenly the first sound I had heard. A pattering sound along the floor. I felt a sharp pain in the calf of my right leg. Instinctively I swatted and connected with a furry body the size of a rat. I could hear it scamper away in the darkness, and I could feel the pain in my leg. But at the same time I could smell that odor again and I felt a tremendous disappointment that I had not been able to get a mouthful of that delicious flesh! Sure, the truth forced itself on me. I was getting those thoughts from the mind of the rat. Either the fall had made me able to read minds or the rat was able to project thoughts as no creature I had ever heard of before could do.

The rat was getting ready to make another attack. His hunger was so acute that it made me hungry. But my excitement and fascination in the exercise of my new faculty of reading a mind engrossed my attention. I analyzed the thoughts I was receiving from him. They certainly weren't words, although my own thoughts had been associated with words so much that it seemed that the rat's thoughts were in the form of words. But careful attention to the thoughts were in the form of words. But careful attention to the thoughts I was receiving enabled me to separate the received thought from the association in my mind quite easily.

Rising to my feet, senses alert, I prepared for the second attack. The rat's anger and fear and hunger were strong in my mind. My odor was a delectable thing in his mind. He darted toward me. I raised my right foot and brought it down with crushing force. I felt the soft yielding body under my foot, the emotion of alarm and panic hit my mind like a sledge hammer blow. Then suddenly my thoughts were entirely my own again.

MY FIRST reaction was one of regret that I had killed the creature. Then loneliness surged through my mind as I realized that I was again alone with my thoughts. I kicked the rat's body to one side in the dark and sat down again to reflect on my amazing experience. Was I actually able to read the rat's mind or was he gifted with the ability to project thoughts so that anyone could have read them? I instantly rejected the thought that I might be crazy and the whole incident a product of my imagination. It had been too vivid and too real. I decided to try an experiment.

Making my mind as nearly blank as I could, I thought loudly, slowly, and clearly, "Help! Help! Can anyone hear my thoughts?" Then I listened with my ears and mind keyed up, but skeptical of results, for it was madness to even think that I would get an answer. So I was really startled when

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my mind began to hear a voice as slow and distinct as my own mental voice.

"Yes. I can hear you." Amusement, the self-assuredness of one long practiced in the thing he is doing, and friendliness seemed to come with the words as a subdued overtone. "I have been getting a great deal of enjoyment out of listening to your thoughts while you were awakening to your new ability to hear them."

"Who are you and where am I? How do I get out of here?" I asked in a rush of thought.

"I think you are in the passage from the cliff," came the answer. "You will have to guess which way is down and start out. You needn't be afraid. There are no pitfalls in your way. Feel along the wall and you will be all right. My name is Max. I live in here. Have lived here for hundreds of years."

Naturally I thought I hadn't heard him right on that hundreds of years. Later I found that was correct. He had lived in here that long. Anyway, I did as he said and started out down the cave passage. Slowly and cautiously. As I went I talked with Max some more. I explained what had happened to me and who I was.

"How does it happen I can receive and project thoughts?" I finally asked him.

"Everybody down here can do that," he replied. "Your nature was changed by your fall so that you not only can read and talk to other minds down here by telepathy, but also with those outside the cave. The next time you run into a rat you don't need to kill him. Just think fear and the desire to run away. He will think these are his own thoughts and follow them by avoiding you."

"Can I contact Marg, my wife?" I asked eagerly.

"Not yet. But you will be able to after your mind gets stronger," came the reply. Just then the wall started to curve away from me. Max sensed the turning. "Stop just a minute," he said. I stopped and waited for a few minutes.

"What's the matter " I thought out.

"I'm just contacting the minds of the rats near you who are aware of your proximity in an effort to place your position," Max answered. "There! Now, put your back to the wall and take three steps forward. That should bring you to the opposite side of the branch passage. Ah. That's it. Now go back the way you came a few steps. That's right. A sharp turn. Uh huh. Now you're back on the main passage again. Just keep on."

"How can you hear the rats around me when I can't?" I asked.

"Oh, but you can!" came the reply. "Just listen for them."

I listened with my mind and sure enough there was a faint cacaphony of little thoughts and sensations impinging on my mind. Thoughts that had the same "feel" as those of the rat I had killed. I was silent for a while, walking along with a reasonable degree of caution. I had been doing a lot of thinking in the back of my mind. I knew I had fallen down that cliff far enough to hurt myself pretty badly. A horrible theory was forcing itself on my consciousness.

"Am I dead " I asked Max, dreading the reply.

"Oh, no," came back instantly. "You are alive all right. It's just that this place makes you feel so strange. You are having the natural reaction everyone gets when they first come here."

"Everyone?" I echoed. "Don't they get out once they are here?"

"Those that want to can leave," Max answered. "But most of them don't want to by the time they can. You'll

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know all about that shortly."

SUDDENLY fingers clutched my shoulder and clamped tight. Uncontrolled panic engulfed me. But Max's mental voice broke in to my panic and arrested it. "Here we are," it said. "It's only me."

"Whew!" I exploded in relief. "Don't scare me so." I reached out and clutched his arm. Believe me, it was a comfort to touch a fellow man. He chuckled with amusement.

"Let's go where we can see," I demanded. "Or if you've got a match on you, light it. I've got to see if I can see. This darkness is getting me down."

Max chuckled again. Suddenly the cave lit up, and I could see everything. Max was standing just in front of me, his arm still on my shoulder, a smile on his handsome face. He was very tall. About six feet eight, and well built. His black hair went back in a messy pompadour, like he had been combing it back with his fingers instead of a comb. His face was as smooth as a woman's, without a hair on it. His clothes were a sort of cross between a yogi outfit and pair of coveralls. They were made out of a heavy sort of gray material like monk's cloth. And he was barefooted. His eyes were large and round, and a deep blue with a shade of gray in them. A wisdom and understanding seemed to come from them that made me recall his statement that he was hundreds of years old, and I almost could believe that, looking into those eyes.

I stepped back and looked around curiously. The cave walls were white like the surface of a salt lick and very smooth. I looked for the source of the light and couldn't find any. "Where did the light come from?" I asked.

"I made it," came the amazing reply. And Max's lips did not move. They had moved when he chuckled, but not now. He answered my wordless question. "My chuckle has a universal meaning, but I cannot speak your English language. So when I speak it must be by telepathy and in mental and auditory concepts so that it seems like your language to you."

"How did you make the light?" I asked.

"There really isn't any light, Jack," he replied. "I just know how everything looks and project that knowledge into your consciousness. For example, if you look down at yourself now, you will seem to have no body. If you feel of the wall you will find it is rougher than it looks. The darkness is still here, but to give you comfort I will continue to make it seem like there is light. And since I know these caves very well you will hardly be aware of the difference. In fact, if you think of how you look, slowly, I will give you substance. Then you can see yourself."

Amazed and speechless, I nevertheless managed to think of my clothes, the way my hands look, and everything else about me. And slowly my fingers became solid and real. I looked at it critically and could find nothing wrong with it. I felt of different parts of me and they felt just as they looked.

"Well, I'll—be—darned," I exclaimed. "Now I've seen everything!"

"Oh, no you haven't," said Max, laughing. And now his lips moved so that I would have sworn he was talking. I marvelled more and more.

Every part of his features was clear in detail. It seemed impossible that it was really dark, and that I was really seeing only a mental image in the mind of my new friend.

"Soon you will not need me to see," he said, reading my thoughts. "When you become stronger you will be able

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to 'see' objects in reality by sensing the feeble insect thoughts around you, paying attention only to their strength and direction, and fill in the gaps. You will be able to explore the caves and the surrounding country at will by reading what the various life forms are sensing around them. But, come. I can see that you are tired and hungry after your long hike up above, your fall, and subsequent adventures. I have taken the liberty to contact your wife and tell her of your whereabouts, since you are at present not sufficiently strong to do so yourself."

HOW right he was! I suddenly became aware that I was so tired and hungry that I would have laid down right there if I had been alone. Max turned and started down the passageway and I walked along beside him. After about a mile of this we emerged into a large open cave. The roof was not high. No more than twenty feet at the highest point. The floor was level. In the center of the cave there was a group of people of about the same appearance as Max. Most of them were lying on the floor in various stages of repose. A few were standing in a small group and seemed to be talking.

Max called out to them and they turned toward him. There followed an exchange of thought so rapid that I could get very little of it, and that little did not make any sense. The emotions that accompanied the exchange were plain, however, and they were mostly fear and puzzlement and worry. I gathered there was some sort of danger threatening them.

They became aware of my presence and asked Max about me. "He is the newcomer from the cliff," replied Max. "He has had enough for one day so we will feed him and let him sleep for awhile. Then he can meet all of us." They all smiled at me and nodded their heads in greeting. A table of food was brought to me and I was really pleased, for it might have come from the hotel down in the valley. Hot coffee, a standard salmon steak dinner with hot rolls, topped off with a piece of perfect apple pie.

I went to sleep shortly after, with a vague feeling that something was screwy somewhere, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it.

I AWOKE to complete darkness. For a second it made me panicky, then the memory of yesterday's events came back with a rush and I calmed down. Without moving, I probed the darkness. At first nothing came to me. Then, little by little, thoughts entered my consciousness which were like those of the rats. Little feeding thoughts, and odor thoughts with alien pleasure and fear associations accompanying them. For a while I amused myself by studying them and trying to identify the creatures that were thinking them. But soon I wanted to greet my new friend, Max, so I called out verbally, "Max, how about some light on the subject?" There was no answer, either verbal or mental.

I listened with all my senses alert, trying to get one thought that was human. I found that by imagining my mind was going out farther and farther, the insect and rat thoughts changed the same way they would have done if they were actual sounds and I was walking along, overtaking and then passing them. After a little practice I was able to point my thought receiving sense in one direction and cause it to travel forward or backward at any speed, or suddenly jump forward an unknown distance. But I had no way of knowing how far away any particular mind was,

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because the darkness made it impossible to coordinate my actual focusing with real distances.

I tried to remember how far it was across the cavern. As nearly as I could remember it was about two hundred feet. And I had lain down almost in the center. So it should be about a hundred feet to the wall in any direction. I directed my mental perception slowly forward in an attempt to contact insect thoughts on the wall of the cavern. It worked! At what I thought should be a hundred feet the faint conglomeration of feelings, thoughts suddenly became strong. I held my attention there and willed it to gradually focus on one insect. Soon it had done so so completely that consciously I was almost that insect. I was aware of its every thought,—the sensory impressions it was receiving, the feeling of six legs moving in rhythm, the busy but contented mood of the thing as it found an occasional particle of food, and the taste of the morsel in its mouth. The taste, however, although it was pleasant to the insect was quite nauseating to me. The nausea upset my effort at concentration and I lost the contact I had with the bug.

My mind drew in on itself and I began to wonder what had become of my companions. That feeling that something was screwy, which I had had when I went to sleep, returned. It was the meal I had eaten, of course. Hypnosis. There had been no meal. But I had received some sort of nourishment because even now I felt full, and I must have been asleep several hours.

I grew restless and felt that I must get up and move around. Rising to my feet I sent my mind along the floor ahead of me and walked slowly toward the wall. It worked smoothly. I became aware of the wall as I neared it, and when I thought it must be only a foot in front of me I reached out and touched it. It really was a foot in front of me! Confidence surged through me. I turned and walked across the cavern again and again, exercising my new powers. It wasn't long before I felt that I could go anyplace in the caverns without bumping into a thing.

I HAD to laugh in sheer exultation. Here I was, Jack Sloan, owner and operator of a chain of grocery stores. My whole life had been wrapped up in price lists, bank balances, and paying my wife's bills. I had never gone to church nor read a serious book in my adult life, and now look at me! In twenty-four hours I had become a master telepathist. I didn't need any eyes. I could use the senses of the living creatures around me to tell me where I was. I felt a comradeship with nature come over me that was so overwhelming that a tear actually squeezed out of my eye and slid down onto my nose.

Where had Max and his friends gone? I tried to contact him again with nothing but silence for an answer. So I decided to start out looking for him. There were several tunnels leading off from the cavern. I picked one at random and decided to explore it for perhaps a mile. If I found nothing I would come back and try another one.

The one I had chosen led downward at a steep slant and was fairly straight. I went about a mile without finding anything other than the insects. So I returned and retraced my steps. I had come back about half way when the tunnel started to slope downward again. That was wrong! It should go uphill right back to the cavern. I must have taken a branch tunnel. I about faced and retraced my steps a short way, slowly exploring for the juncture of the two tunnels. I soon came to it and followed the one that went uphill.

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Now I went more cautiously, watching for branches. There were several, but I kept on the main one and went slowly, sending my new sense ahead to explore.

I had gone much more than the distance back to the cavern, and finally was forced to conclude that I was lost. One of those branches back there was the one to the cavern. But which one? Finding my way back now seemed out of the question. If I continued onward I would soon be completely lost. I might starve to death before Max could find me. My prospects seemed utterly hopeless. I sank to the floor in despair and self reproach. I should have stayed in the cavern until Max returned.

Now if I continued upward I would get hopelessly lost. If I went downward my chances of picking the right branch were pretty slim. And if I stayed here I would never get any place. Of the three choices, going back down seemed the most promising. Eventually I might stumble on a tunnel that would lead to the outside. I wondered if these caves in the heart of Mt. Sl sta had ever been explored. Certainly the mountain must be honeycombed with them. I puzzled over the mystery of Max. Who was he and where did he fit? And greatest puzzle of all, —how did it happen that I was suddengifted with the ability to read minds vividly? Had the fall on my head brought that about? Or was there some property of these caverns that made it possible? I was in a strange and utterly fantastic world. There was no doubt about that. If I ever got back into my own world and kept my ability to read minds—

I had to chuckle.

I went back down the way I had come, taking it easy and occasionally probing ahead of me as far as I could by reading the thoughts of insects, rats, and even an occasional snake which had wandered into the caves and became lost or, perhaps, had found food more plentiful and stayed. It was fascinating to exercise my new faculty of mind reading on all these creatures. I had by now become so adept at it that I could almost become a part of the creature, causing it to do things at my command.

The tunnel I was in wound downward at a slope of about thirty degrees, sometimes levelling off for a hundred feet or so. There were many branches, and sometimes no indication as to which branch to take. Several times I bumped my head when the ceiling dropped lower than my five-feet-ten.

I HAD been traveling in this fashion for what seemed like several hours, although I had no way of telling the passage of time and it might have been only a half hour, when I heard the vague murmur of human voices. They were so faint that at first I thought they were the sound of a waterfall, but as I went forward they became stronger and I could make out an occasional word. For some reason I became cautious, cloaking my thoughts or at least hoping I was doing that, while at the same time I tried to read the thoughts of those ahead of me. The sounds were traveling farther than my mind reading ability could reach, however, so I continued on downward. When I came to a branch I would go down the passage from which the sounds seemed to come. If they grew fainter, I would retrace my steps and try the other branch.

Needless to say, the going was very slow. I had to stop quite often and probe ahead, always being careful that my own thoughts were as quiet as I could make them. I remembered that Max had said that everyone here could

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read thoughts, and that Max's companions had been worried about something.

Suddenly a weight landed on my back. I turned in an attempt to throw it off and other bodies engulfed me so that in a matter of seconds I was completely overpowered. New thoughts beat against my mind. Evil exultation, glee, anticipation of some terrible thing that was to be done to me. They had been doing what I had thought I was doing—cloaking their thoughts so that I could not read them. And now that they were no longer doing so their evil minds delighted in letting me see what I was in for.

With at least two holding each of my arms and legs I was carried along, struggling, until we reached a cavern considerably larger than the one Max's friends had been in. In the center was a roaring fire, the smoke escaping through an opening in the roof. The flames lit up the cavern and my captors. Actually seeing them only served to increase my alarm. Where Max had been human, intelligent, and friendly in appearance, my captors were utterly beastly.

They were short. No taller than five feet at the most. Very wide and husky looking. Their bodies were naked except for loin cloths, and covered with a scanty, fuzzy growth of downy white hair. Their legs were stocky and bowed like those of some Japs I had seen, their arms reaching to the knees like an ape's. Their faces, although entirely human in structure, were beastly in expression, with large lips and teeth. A sloping forehead retreated into a thatch of matted white hair which fell down over their shoulders in back. I saw with absolute certainty that I could expect no mercy whatever from them. They were depraved beasts—human only in form.

But even in my hopelessness I marveled that a race of such creatures could live in the heart of the Shasta Mountain without being discovered. Surely they would have to make forays into the surrounding country for food. Obviously they had been cave people for many generations to develop their present appearance. I had very little inclination to wonder about their history though, because they were crowded around me and pinching and poking me unmercifully as a few of them concentrated on tying my arms and legs together in such a way that I would be unable to move. They seemed completely insane and without any human characteristics.

I sent a desperate, mental plea for Max to come to my aid. Instantly one of the brutes struck me in the mouth, crushing my lips against my teeth. "Do that again and you'll wish you hadn't," he telepathed. I sagged to the ground and gave up even the desire to live. But they were not through with me.

ONE of them crowded through around me and came back with a saw and a large knife. The others shrieked with delight. Evidently this was something they were going to especially enjoy, so I looked for the worst. The worst was beyond my ability to conceive.

"Ears first! Ears first!" clamored the crowd. Grinning, the devil bent over, grabbed an ear, and to my unspeakable horror, sliced. He stood up and swung my amputated ear in front of my eyes, grinning, his fat lips open and exposing his oversize teeth. My vision blurred and I fainted.

Not for long was I blessed with oblivion. I opened my eyes to see the circle of faces still around me. There was something in my mouth. I wondered what it could be and instantly the thought message, "Your ear, your ear, your ear!" beat on my staggering mind.

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I spit it out, nausea and horror pouring over me in wave after wave.

The devil with the knife bent over me again. . . . Soon I seemed to live in a stupor. As these unholy fiends progressed in their torture I became numb. No longer did they seem to know nor care how I reacted. They were too engrossed in their torture.

When they used the saw on my bones in their many and progressive amputations of my feet, legs, fingers, hands, and arms the rasping pain of the saw teeth cutting soon receded into a dull, inexpressible torture. The rest I was beyond feeling. I knew I had been cut up too much to live long. I waited only for death to deliver me.

My mind wandered. I tried to talk, but my lips were gone and my tongue was a bloody mass in my mouth. A few times my mind cleared enough for me to see my surroundings. Finally I was alone. I sank into oblivion.

I AWOKE at last. Opening my eyes I saw that the fire still burned. But of my captors there was no trace. My ropes were gone. I rolled over onto my stomach and feebly raised up until I was swaying on my feet. Then the memory of my torture came back. *But I was standing and my legs had been cut off inch by inch!* My arms! My hands! They were still on! I reached up and felt of my ears and they were intact. But I had seen one and had spit it out of my mouth!

My mind reeled. For a time I was completely insane. Laughing and crying I tried to run. My legs would fail me and cause me to sprawl forward. Rising, I would frantically run on. Soon I stumbled into a tunnel. Whimpering and shivering I felt my way along the walls of the passage, stumbling from one wall to the other, no longer able to concentrate enough to progress as I had done before my nightmarish dream. I was gradually coming to believe it must have been a dream, for it would have been an uttter impossibility to have actually lost my limbs and then regained them, not to mention my ears, lips, and tongue.

At first I feared pursuit, but as I traveled further and further downward this fear wore off. Soon I felt safe enough to sit down and rest and collect my thoughts. I tried not to think of my horrible experience, but instead, to concentrate on regaining my ability to read thoughts. After a time I was able to hear the little thought murmurs of the insects along the tunnel, so I arose and proceeded on my downward journey. My one paramount desire was to escape the darkness and horror of these caves and be once again in the heavenly sunlight of the outside.

How long I traveled downward I have no way of knowing. Sometimes I slept. I vaguely began to wonder if I had not gone so far down that I was underneath the valley at the base of the mountain. I had no desire to eat for some reason. My naps seemed not only to refresh me but to nourish me as well.

Soon I began to feel a mysterious presence. I could sense a mind observing me from time to time, but though I questioned it I received no reply. Most of the time it wasn't there. Then I would sense it just as I had about decided it must be imagination.

"Hello," I would telepath. But there was no answer. I studied my feelings toward this unknown mind. It did not seem to be evil. Yet it didn't seem to be friendly, either.

I came to a branch in the tunnel and decided to take the right fork. A powerful feeling pressed on me and against my will I turned to the left. It recalled to my mind the fact that I had done the same thing to a snake before I

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was captured by the cave devils. Fearful, I tried to turn back. I couldn't. Then the voice came.

It is impossible to describe that voice. Mental though it was, it had the qualities of sound. Deep and resonant. Calm and unhurried as though the mind in back of it were immeasurably ponderous and wise. Utterly clear and concise in detail came the voice.

"You do not need to be afraid. Come. Come to me and I will help you leave the caves."

With a new confidence I stepped forward. Hope was like a refreshing liquid coursing through my veins. But at the same time a suspicion was forming in the back of my mind. As if in answer to my thought the voice came again.

"Yes. I am a woman. My name is Ee."

I hurried, almost at a trot. No longer did I have to grope my way through the tunnel. My steps were firm and sure. At each branch I took the correct fork unhesitatingly.

And soon the darkness began to grow less. I could make out the walls of the passage and see ahead a way. The light grew until it was as bright as day. Yet I knew it was not light. It was the same as the brightness of Max's light. So it was mental. The darkness was still there but I could see.

Ee must have a metal power much greater than that of Max, I thought, to be able to do all this.

I ENTERED a long, straight tunnel, that ran level for a hundred yards. At the far end the light was blinding. Suddenly I knew that it was partly real light. Not the mentally induced illusion of lighted surroundings. I hurried ahead and in a moment was emerging from the tunnel into an underground world of such titanic proportions that I was stunned with amazement.

The cavern was so vast that it seemed almost to be an open valley under a noonday sun. Perhaps a mile away across a valley covered with yellowish grass the far wall loomed as a gigantic barrier, extending to the right and to the left almost as far as the eye could reach before curving inward to eventually join the cliff at my back. The roof was an immense dome whose curves were lost in a floating white mist, far overhead. Through this mist, or from it, came the light which gave life to this underground world.

Here and there on the grassy plain creatures something like deer grazed peacefully, and several small hills, on which grew stunted trees whose tortuously twisting branches were sparsely covered with yellow leaves, rose slightly to hide part of the landscape from view. It was a study in yellow and gray that would have challenged the world's greatest artists.

Coming toward me from the nearest wooded hill were several figures. Leading the group were Max and Ee. I ran toward them, an immense relief surging over me. In answer to my rush of questions Max told me that they had been surprised by a group of the cave barbarians and had barely escaped with their lives. Due to the fact that I had been asleep and they had drawn the barbarians off in their flight, I had escaped capture at that time.

I thought of my torture and my waking up to find my limbs were intact and decided to keep still on that so they wouldn't think me insane. Max, reading my thoughts, looked grim. "That is their way," he replied. "Physical torture is as nothing compared to that induced by hypnosis. They are masters at it."

But now I was close to the group. Getting a good look at Ee, I stopped,

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breathless. If I thought before that I knew what beauty was I knew now that I was wrong. She was about five-feet-six, slender, but well built. That part was more or less standard. Her face and eyes and hair were what took my breath. They had a beauty impossible to describe. It was a thing in itself that seemed to envelop her features, rather than be a part of them. Suddenly I remembered that they could read my thoughts and I blushed. Ee blushed too.

Max smoothed over our embarrassment by saying, "We had better get back to the temple. We are too exposed out here."

So with Max on one side of me and Ee on the other we hastened toward the wooded hillock they called their temple. The rest of the group were the same ones that I had met with Max what seemed ages ago. They all seemed to be of the same race. Whether it was any race found on the surface I don't know. But I am sure it wasn't any white European race.

Many things were puzzling me and I lost no time in asking about them. "How soon can I get out of here to the outside?" I asked anxiously.

"We will discuss that later," replied Max. "There are many things you must learn and many more you must do before you could possibly make it to the surface."

"The surface?" I queried. "Then we are actually under the surface of the valley?"

"No. We are under the mountain," Ee chipped in. "But our level is almost a mile under that of the valley."

I WHISTLED in amazement. We were now near one of the creatures grazing on the plain. I examined it in curiosity. Shaped something like a deer, it was nevertheless smaller and chunkier. Its horns were more like those of a moose, but lighter in build and longer and more branched, the branches having a bony web-like growth connecting them. They were completely unconcerned about our approach, not even lifting their heads at our passing.

"They must be pretty good eating," I remarked, nodding my head toward the one we were passing.

"I wouldn't know," replied Max, smiling. "You see, we are a vegetarian people down here. Not exactly vegetarian either. We take most of our nourishment in the form of pills. Their manufacture process has been handed down for generations and we have lived on nothing else for many generations also. Some vegetable substances go into their makeup, but for the most part they are chemical."

But now we were entering the wooded area. A few steps through the outer fringe of trees brought us to a stone entryway. I now perceived that what I had mistakenly thought to be a hill was in reality a building whose sides were sloping, and covered with soil. In this soil the trees found root. In fact, as I found later, they were planted and cultivated because the leaves were the vegetable source used in the manufacture of the food tablets.

The entryway gave access to a long narrow hall whose walls were made of large blocks of marble-like stone. On either wall along its length doorways could be seen. The doors were made of wood and slid into the wall, as I found when Max opened the third one we came to. The room we entered was a large oblong one with a high ceiling, dotted with lights. These, as I soon found upon inquiry, were globes of the same radioactive stuff that coated the dome outside, and were mainly chunks that had broken loose from time to time and fallen to the plain.

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We were soon seated in large stone chairs which were cushioned with soft pillows covered with the same monk's cloth material as the clothes these people wore. There were perhaps a hundred people of both sexes in the room. I noticed that they all seemed to be about the same age—the men about forty and the women about twenty-five. It surprised me to find, after I had been there some time, that the youngest of them was several centuries old. I could never quite bring myself to believe that we had looked the same when our pilgrim fathers were founding the new nation.

It seemed to be some sort of an assembly held to discuss my entry into their midst. While I was looking and taking in everything, Max was talking in a strange language to the assembly.

I tried to tune into what was being said and found to my amazement that I couldn't read thoughts in here. Maybe there was some sort of a blanketing device or maybe they were just cloaking their thoughts from me. Anyway, it was so much like my old life not to be able to hear thoughts that a feeling of loneliness crept over me. I started to think of Marg and the stores. I wondered if she thought I was dead. Then I remembered that Max had contacted her and told her I was all right. I chuckled. If he had done that the disembodied voice proclaiming my safety had more than likely convinced Marg that I was dead, rather than the opposite. Wouldn't she be surprised!

A slight tap on my shoulder brought me back to the present. Max had been saying something to me. He repeated it.

"Jack, we have been talking over your chances of making it to the surface. They are very slim. Impossible, the way you are now. The droogas, those people, if you care to call them that, that tortured you, are a very numerous race. And they occupy all the avenues of escape from this underground world. We have never bothered to secure an avenue of access to the outside because we had no need of one. We are able, as you know, to contact the outside without going there, and are too contented with our life here to want a change. Here we have our libraries which contain the history of our people, their science and culture, the history and development of your own people as we have observed it through their own eyes, together with our comments on it, and many other things."

AND now, Ee interrupted him. "Jack, if you choose to stay with us I am sure you will be happy. You can learn and grow powerful in mind so that you can sit back like a god and read the hearts of mortal men. You will not become immortal, but you can live several centuries. And believe me, you will not regret it ever. I realize you love your wife very much, and that your past life was fascinating. That you enjoyed your business and your associates. But if you go back that joy cannot last more than another ten or twenty years. Your wife will grow old before your eyes. You will eventually have to relegate your business activities to the younger generation. And almost tomorrow, so to speak, you will die an old man. Here you will just have started to live." And there was a promise in her eyes that could not be mistaken.

"If you choose to go," Max broke in, "there is the very great risk of being captured again by the droogas. You will know that their torture is hypnosis, but that won't make it any less. In two years' time you can make your mind so strong that it will be possible for you to cloak your thoughts completely. Then you will stand a real chance of

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getting through. But then your wife will believe you dead, will have sold your stores and may be married again."

"What is wrong with several of you g o i n g along with me?" I asked. "Couldn't some of you help me get out? If that is impossible, why couldn't I w r i t e Marg a note. Something she could understand. And one of you who are so strong mentally take it to her or mail it to her?"

"Unfortunately," Max's voice was very sad, "The one of us who did that would die. You surface people have a virus which only gives you a cold, but which causes us to die in great agony and fever. Here in the caves that virus dies in a week. But before that week could pass your messenger would be dead. That is why I could not bring you straight here when I first found you. I had to risk infection in order to give you enough food tablets to keep you nourished for a week. But it was necessary for you to wander around for a week until your cold virus had been killed by the sterilizing rays of the metals in the cave walls."

"You see," one of the others added, "we cannot permit any one of us to take the risk for what we must consider a relatively unimportant thing. And it would be utterly impossible for you to reach the surface yourself without being captured and tortured many times. You would probably reach the surface an imbecile, your mind destroyed by the strain of dying a thousand horrible deaths."

I looked from one to the other of the assembly. "You are offering me a choice, but in reality there is no choice. Is that it?" I asked. And solemnly one after another nodded his head.

"There is no choice," Ee voiced their unspoken sympathy. "But we had to let you see it for yourself. If we had just said you had to stay you would have thought yourself our prisoner. Really, we would be very happy if we could restore you to your former life but we cannot."

"Well, I guess I'll have to make the best of it then," I concluded aloud, trying to sound cheerful.

"For the time being, at any rate," smiled Ee. Taking my hand she led me toward the doorway. "Come with me. I'll show you around. We have many beautiful works of art. And there is the library where you will have to spend a large part of your time studying."

THE library was a large, very long room with stacks crowding the whole floor, leaving narrow corridors between each stack of shelves, which went all the way to the ceiling. Off the library proper, and entered by a long row of doorways that stretched along one whole wall, there were small study rooms.

I picked a book off the shelves and looked at it. "Ha. You have overlooked something, Ee," I said. "These books are written in your own language and I was never any good at learning foreign languages."

"Look at it again," she answered with a peculiar smile on her face.

I looked, and the meaningless symbols that covered its pages suddenly became intelligible. Startled, I asked "How did that happen?"

"Oh, it's very simple. I just caused you to be able to understand the writing," she said. Wasn't that just like a woman? Later, after we had looked around some more she added, like an afterthought, "I will only have to cause you to understand the writing for a few days. Then you will have sufficiently strong memory tracts of the language to continue by yourself."

From the library we entered the art museum. There I saw the statues and

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paintings of things long ago lost to the world. People and animals in stone, and so lifelike in detail that I had to ask Ee if they were really stone or if they had been petrified by some chemical process. Paintings of strange landscapes and cities with buildings reaching thousands of feet into the sky. My mind was full of questions, but I left them unspoken. I had sensed a certain feeling of reverence and reserve come over Ee when we had entered this room and had the strange feeling that we should remain silent in here—like it was a church. So without a word we passed through this museum into the next room.

Here there were machines in orderly rows. They were strange. Some seemed to be nothing but boxes with a knob or two sticking out on the top. Some had a dome top that seemed to be separated from the base so that it might be turned about and aimed, and had a spiral coil of copper pipe attached on opposite sides, coiled in the shape of a flat, slightly concave disk. Like a calrod unit. These went into a ball joint in the dome. There were also large, transparent cylinders with complicated looking tubing and gloves of glass and copper attached to them in various places.

Ee broke the silence. "This is the storeroom for our machinery. We have had no use for it for a long time. We are now able to do most of the things these machines were designed for without them. For example, this machine was designed to renew the body so that it would last almost indefinitely. We can now do that by an effort of will—until it comes our turn to advance to the next world." She was pointing to one of the cylinders. Turning to one of the boxes with knobs she said, "This machine was designed to solve problems in logic and mathematics. We have no further use for it because it has long ago completed its work."

We left this room of wonders. Max was waiting for us in the hall. "Well, now that you have seen the sights, it is time to show you the room you are to live in while you are here. It will be yours to do with as you please," he said.

And so my first day ended in the city of my new friends. I call it day, though there was no night here. I was tired and completely exhausted. The reaction had set in from my nightmarish period in the dark of the tunnels and my capture by the Droogas. Here I thought I was safe. If I had known what was in store for me in the near future I wouldn't have felt quite so secure, though.

THE next few days went swiftly and were fascinating in the extreme. I learned to project my mind at will, sending it into the caves farther and farther each day. Finally I could reach as far as the outside. Then, for some reason, my schooling switched to history and other subjects. I resolved secretly to send my mind to the surface without the knowledge of my teachers but found that my room had been shielded to prevent my doing so.

The next morning I hunted up Max, and I was mad and determined to have it out. "Max!" I said when I ran into him in one of the work rooms. "What the hell is the matter with my sending my mind to the outside? My life is out there. My business, my wife, and all my friends. If you think for one minute that you can maneuver me into being in love with Ee and be content to stay down here you're crazy. And I don't want any of your superior airs, either. Even if you are hundreds of years old and so much smarter than me that you class me as an idiot."

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"Just a minute, Jack." Max interrupted my mad outburst. "We thought you understood. You don't have the slightest conception of the nature of telepathy, do you?"

"Sure I do," I replied. "You just send out your mind, so to speak. It's a sort of organ like the eye or the ear, only it doesn't get developed in surface people. That is, the part you read minds with."

"Hm. I see." Max looked serious and grave. "Did you ever entertain the possibility that it might be something, — ah, radically different than that?" He gave me a piercing, studious look. "No, I see you haven't, Jack."

He was silent for so long I thought he had forgotten me or intended to ignore me. Just as I had thought up something to say that would really stir him up, he spoke.

"This calls for a meeting of better minds than mine. Skip your studies today, Jack, and go for a walk. Visit one of the other temples if you like. I'll send for you when we have discussed this."

"O.K." I said and turned to go.

"Don't do anything rash, Jack, and take the underground passages. Don't go out on the plain," called Max after me as I left the work room.

"Nuts to you," I thought to myself and hoped he wasn't listening. I was still mad and intended to do as I pleased. Just to spite him I decided to go out on the plain, although I really wanted to take one of the underground passages. They were really interesting with their mural paintings of all kinds of historical scenes. I never tired of looking at them. When you looked at one intently for awhile it seemed to become real, with people moving, the wind blowing, or the waves moving, depending on what the picture was about. And after looking awhile longer you could almost get right into the painting and travel around and be there.

I LEFT the temple by the same door I had first entered it. No one was in sight. Staying just within the outer fringe of trees I circled around to the side of the woods facing the nearest neighboring temple, which was about two hundred yards away and about the same distance from the gigantic wall of the cavern as the one I had been in. As I circled I examined the plain, searching for signs of life other than the everpresent, grazing, deer-like animals. I could see the black opening I had come from when I entered the cavern. Also there were several others, widely separated, along the base of the cavern wall. Far up the face of the cliff several other openings could also be seen. But there was no sign of any human being.

I did not dare to probe outward with my mind, for, as yet, I was not too expert at cloaking my thoughts so that no one could be aware of them, and I did not want Max to know that I was disobeying him.

I struck out through the knee-high yellow grass in a fast, nervous stride, keeping my eyes peeled toward the many tunnel openings so that I would not be surprised by a sudden rush of the drooga people if they were hiding there.

To my right and perhaps fifty feet ahead a deer was grazing. Suddenly it started to run toward me, then veered off toward the wooded area I was headed for. I stopped in my tracks and peered intently toward where it had been. There was an almost imperceptible movement of the grass, as though someone or something were slowly creeping toward me.

I broke into a trot. In the next instant there arose from the grass dozens

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of the ape-like droogas in a circle about me. I was surrounded by them. My only hope lay in reaching one side of the ring before they could close in, and overpowering the one or two that blocked my way of escape, so I changed my trot to a frantic burst of speed. But they, sensing my purpose, headed me off.

Suddenly I was knocked flat by some inexplicable force. And in the air around me several glowing, golden balls of fire appeared, hovering motionless. The droogas came to a quick halt and above the head of each a small, black globe appeared, slowly enlarging until it was almost as large as the golden balls. The blackness of each seemed alive. It seemed to flow and undulate, recede and recede into the infinite distance and yet remain stationary. The golden ones about me seemed to have that same quality but with the additional appearance of angry, and unlimited power.

A bolt of raw force lashed out from one of the golden balls and struck a black one. The black one bounced backward, seemed to hesitate for an instant as though it were tied to the drooga by a string, and then, as if the string had suddenly broken, it darted upward toward the glowing mist in the top of the cavern, growing smaller as it receded, until it vanished. At the same time the drooga over which it had been hovering seemed to go lax. His eyes took on a vacant stare and he slowly dropped to his knees, then sprawled forward on his face into the tall grass.

There was a sudden silence that seemed to last for hours. The gold and the black hills hung motionless as if waiting, or gathering forces. Suddenly a flash of intense black lashed out toward a golden globe. A few feet away from it it seemed to strike an invisible wall, hesitate, and then vanish.

The droogas slowly began to step backward, their eyes toward the golden balls of fire around me, the black globes above them retreating with them, poised like boxers in the ring, ready to attack or defend themselves on an instant's notice.

One moment the golden balls were hovering around me, pulsing, cold fury radiating from them in surging waves. The next moment it was as if they had never been there. At almost the same moment the black balls vanished and the droogas turned and ran toward the nearest exit to the cavern.

THE one who had fallen remained motionless. I got up out of the grass and approached him. He was dead all right, and as I watched his body seemed to melt and run into the soil. A vapor arose from his slowly vanishing form and drifted aimlessly toward the cliff. In a few moments there was no trace of him left.

Then, crystal-clear, came the mental voice of Max. "Return to the temple, Jack. We are ready to talk to you." Slowly I turned and retraced my steps to the temple. I felt like a child who was about to be reprimanded, and I was angry at Max and his friends for being so superior and making me feel so inferior, and angry at myself for the feeling. And I was full of wonder and puzzlement at what had just transpired. By the time I reached the entrance to the temple I was in a very humble and contrite mood.

Hesitatingly I walked down the corridor and slid back the door to the council chamber where I had first gone that day, so long ago it seemed, when I arrived. In it there were only six men. Max was one of them. They wore grave looks, and when they asked me to be seated I sat down without a word. The six moved wooden stools in front

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of me and sat on them, facing me. No word was spoken for a while. They seemed to be waiting. And I was too subdued to feel like doing more than wait and meet whatever was to happen when it happened.

Finally Max spoke. "Jack, we have decided the time has come for you to go on a journey." He turned his eyes toward the ceiling and they took on a faraway look. In that position he continued. "You aren't ready yet. You should wait longer. But you aren't content. So we will have to accompany you on this journey to the surface. It will have to be a trip of the mind only. The droogas know that you are here and that you wish to return to the surface. They will keep a constant watch and our power to defeat them does not extend beyond this cavern."

"Those gold and black balls . . . ?" I queried.

Ignoring my interruption he continued, while the other five sat silent and poker-faced, watching me. "You may wonder how we can accompany you on a mental journey. Well, we won't go into any explanations now. You will be in constant mental contact with the six of us. We will be by your side, so to speak, and as aware of everything you see and think as you are yourself.

"We cannot be gone long," he went on, "because your mind is not yet able to take sustained journeys. So we will guide you to save time. You want to contact your wife, see her, and tell her you are all right? We will not have time for much more than that. In order for you to be guided you will have to enter a state of willing hypnosis. Tlon Atlee," and he nodded toward one of the silent five, "will put you in that state as soon as you feel up to the strain."

"I feel up to it right now," I put in hastily.

"Sorry," Max said. And his voice carried a tone of dismissal. "You must have a good night's sleep and be thoroughly at ease before we start. We will meet you here in the morning." He rose and the others also stood up.

"Okay," I said, also rising. "That's a date."

Smiling wryly, Max added a parting admonition as I turned toward the door, "Keep out of trouble meanwhile, will you, Jack?"

LIFE in the temple had a definite rhythm similar to that on the surface. Although there was continual light from the globes of radio-active stuff it could be covered by the sliding covers that each had so that darkness could be obtained for the period of sleep. There was no set time for sleeping, yet everyone slept at about the same time, the community interests more or less imposing a definite time for rest on the individual. I spent the rest of the day in the library, studying the history of Max's people before they had lived in the cavern.

They had been a powerful and numerous race of people, living in great cities and plying the oceans in motor ships thousands of years before the dawn of history as we knew it on the surface. Their science was much further advanced than ours of today. They had space ships which were propelled by what they called the "light principle" and were a very superstitious race —although science and superstition shouldn't go together. Most of their history concerned itself with the development of the powers of the spirit and contained a lot of hokus pokus about soul power. Also they seemed to put great store in ancestor worship, like the Japs, who claimed to talk regularly with departed spirits, and everyone seemed to believe them—or so the

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books said. However there must have been a few sane people among them or they couldn't have built space ships and developed other scientific things we don't have yet on the present day world.

I am not mathematically inclined and not even Ee could "cause" me to become interested in the mathematical symbols that covered the pages in their books of science, so I learned nothing about their scientific theories.

The day finally wore to a close and I retired to my room. Eventually I slept. There must have been a mickey in the pills I had for my dinner. I noticed a peculiar gleam in the eye of the girl who brought them to me. At any rate I slept soundly and awoke in the morning refreshed and anxious to get going.

When I arrived at the council chamber the same six men were waiting for me. Tlon cast a professional eye on me, in the same way a trainer eyes a boxer who is about to go into the ring. "How do you feel?" he asked me.

"Oh, fine," I replied. "When do we start?" And I felt the same stage fright that I used to feel before I went in the ring when I used to box in college.

"Right now," Tlon answered. "Sit down over here where you can be comfortable and just let your mind relax. Put yourself in a receptive mood. You will have to be guided every minute, so don't try to think for yourself."

While he was talking I was being seated, and as he finished I laid my head back on the cushion placed on the chair back to accommodate it and looked into his eyes. He began to talk in a slow, melodious voice. And as he talked I let my mind follow his words passively. . . .

THERE were seven of us speeding along at incredible velocity. I looked at them amazed, for they were balls of golden fire; and yet I knew they were my companions, Max, Tlon, and the other four, and could recognize them. Max was the ball of fire in the lead. Tlon was speeding along beside me. The six formed a ring about me. We were in one of the tunnels and travelling so swiftly that we bounced from one wall to the other in our forward flight so fast that I could hardly keep track. I seemed to travel through no volition of my own and keep to the center of the ring.

Suddenly we emerged into the light of day, but it was strange in some way. Without hesitation we sped across the valley floor to the slope of the mountain. We had emerged several miles from it and I saw it again as I had seen it with Marg when we first arrived for our vacation. A thousand years ago? It seemed that long.

We were a thousand feet above the surface. Below, climbing the mountain slope was a party of several men and one woman. As we drew nearer I saw that the woman was Marg. I started to speak and voice of Tlon whispered, "Not yet."

So I watched. Devouring every line of her figure, every shade of expression on her lovely face, I watched. There were lines of fatigue and sorrow on her face, and her eyes were sad and red-looking as if she had been crying a lot.

We hovered over the climbing figures, keeping pace with them. I wondered if one of them might look up and see us. The voice of Max whispered, "We are invisible to them."

They reached the path on the ledge that led up the cliff side where Marg had climbed that day. Slowly they toiled upward. One of the men had a rope coiled over his shoulder. "To let them down to the shelf where I entered the caves," I thought.

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"Yes," came the voice of Max and it seemed drawn and tense with excitement.

"Now may I talk to her?" I asked.

"Not yet, Jack. Soon," came the voice of Tlon.

Time seemed to stretch out interminably as the slow march continued up the face of the cliff. Soon the valley stretched out below, the farms and farm buildings beginning to look like miniature drawings in color.

One of the men put out his hand to take Marg's arm and assist her. She shook her head in refusal and continued her weary plodding, the others trailing behind. Suddenly she quickened her pace, rounding a slight curve that hid the path ahead from view. We rounded the bend hugging the cliff wall.

Marg bent over, going to her knees and leaning precariously over the edge of the ledge. The man who offered to assist her took her shoulders and drew her back. The man with the coil of rope took one end and tossed the rest over the edge. Two of the others also took hold, and another took hold of the rope and slid over the edge of the ledge.

Slowly we drifted out from the face of the cliff to watch his descent. The shelf below came into view. On the shelf lay an object. I looked at the face of the cliff for the opening into which I had been dragged. The face of the cliff was bare and without any opening. In panic, not daring to think, I transferred my gaze back to the inert object.

My hiking jacket! My boots! Horror welled up in me from the depths of my being. That head—the skull was crushed flat! But the face—oh—that face! It was MINE!!

"Marg!" I screamed. "Marg, Marg, Marg!" and blackness engulfed me. . . .

"THAT'S funny," said one of the men of the party who had accompanied Margie Sloan to get the body of her husband who had been killed in the fall from the path to the ledge just below several days before. Bending down he picked up a sparrow. It had been flying with five or six others in a group, following them for an hour. The sparrow was gasping for breath, its wings quivering. It seemed paralyzed. Slowly it recovered, and after a moment or two it had struggled free of his grasp and flew away. "Acted like it had heart trouble," he added in a puzzled tone of voice. "Never knew birds to have heart trouble before."

"Yes, Jack. I hear you," Marg was whispering inaudibly, a faraway look in her grief-stricken eyes.

There was no answer.

★ POSSIBILITIES UNLIMITED ★

THE year is 1912. Through the straight, gleaming corridors of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research a group of men walked determinedly toward the laboratory. From head to toe they are clothed in black. Stopping before the door they don black hoods which cover all but their eyes. Quickly they enter the room.

It is windowless. The lights are so arranged that no shadow is cast. Tables are draped in black; all the furniture in the room is black. Everything is spotless, dustless, germless.

Out of the small group, one man emerges. It is evident that he is the leader for the others gathered about him. With his hands he takes a nine-day old fertilized chicken egg from the incubator, washes it, sterilizes it, cautiously cracks the shell, lifts out the unborn chick, lays it on a sterile base, skillfully cuts away its tiny beating heart.

Now the real test is to come! A heart has been removed from a living organism. Can it live outside in the proper medium? The proposed environment is ready. They had cut up, ground, and mashed an embryo until it was a pulp, and then mixed the pulp with a solution of salt to preserve it. Next they had whirled the juice out of the mixture, just as cream is whirled out of milk in the centrifugal separator. The result,—embryonic chicken juice.

Snipping off a bit of heart only eight-hundredths of an inch square, he transfers it to a drop of

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clotted, but clear, chicken blood plasma. An additional drop of embryonic juice and the speck of heart is left to itself, properly protected. The tissue has been incased in its environment where structure and function can interplay.

Two days later the microscopic fleck has doubled in size. It is cut in two with a blade which measures only a tenth of an inch, and then it is bathed to wash away the killing wastes. Quickly the retained bit of tissue is transferred to a new drop of plasma incorporated with fresh embryonic juice.

That was in 1912, a full thirty-two years ago. Dr. Alexis Carrel, one of the greatest scientific adventurers of this or any other day, was the man who began this experiment in life maintenance. His chicken heart has lived for 32 years already and gives promise of outlasting a number of the attendants who, under Dr. Carrel's supervision, have watched over it. The heart receives the most elaborate and observant care. Its diet is especially watched, and changes are made to conform with its changing needs. No heir to a throne could be more carefully cared for.

Potentially the propagation possibilities are enormous. In a year, this microscopic bit of heart would be thirteen quadrillion times larger than the sun if half the growth were not cut away, and if it were theoretically possible to keep all the cells alive as they divide, and divide and divide.

Yes, a living morsel removed from an organism has lived for thirty-two years. Who is this man who nurses life, and how did he find the secret?

Well, Dr. Alexis Carrel was born at St. Foyles Lyon in France. At seventeen he was graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Lyon. His first love was medicine and in 1900 he received his M.D. from the same university. Even then, during his student days, his surgical dexterity was legendary. There was a story among the students to the effect that he could tie a knot in a match box with only three fingers. In 1905 his reputation had spread even to this country and he was invited to join the faculty of the University of Chicago. A year later he entered the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, and it is there that the rest of his work has been done.

From his early days as a student, Carrel felt that the method which scientists used to study the human organism, examining lifeless cells and bloodless muscles, was leading it astray from the truth. How could one learn the truth about life by examining death? The function and structure of an organ, he argued, cannot be split in two. Sound conclusions about life cannot be split in two. Sound conclusions about life cannot be reached by examining mere meat.

These ideas he found expressed in the writings of the great French physiologist, Claude Bernard. He taught that a living organism was not a mere collection of cells and organs; structure and function were dependent. It is a whole, a mechanism of dependencies, in which each organ has its "internal milieu." Structure, function, environment are all united. They should be studied as a unit. A dead chicken is not the same chicken that scratched about in the barnyard. The same is true of excised tissue and organs.

Carrel's thoughts and experiments on the subject led to some other conclusions. In his studies of wounds and fractures, he became convinced that the murderous factor, as far as cells and tissues were concerned, were the toxic wastes produced by those cells in the process of living. This meant that in the process of converting and utilizing food, the cells produce a waste that poisons and destroys the cell. To keep them alive, these wastes must be removed.

One more link was needed in the chain of evidence. It was provided by Professor Ross Harrison's work at Yale. Harrison wanted to know whether nerve fibers grow only of nerve cells in the spinal cord, or whether they can grow from any cells in the body. He dissected a few nerve cells from the spinal cord of an embryo tadpole. Adding a drop of the clear part of a frog's blood, he sealed the whole in a minute glass chamber which he could examine under a microscope. Before his eyes the nerve fibers grew out of the nerve cells. Tissue culture was born as a science.

All this Carrel mulled over in his mind. The ingenious combination of all this new knowledge with his own conclusions gave rise to the magnificent experiment that has proven so much for mankind. It needed the most extensive development of new techniques, perfect methods of cell "transplanting" and the utmost refinement of asepsis. But Carrel was equal to the challenge.

The possibilities now open to the field of science by the acquisition of these new techniques are innumerable. Glands can be observed as they work, and we may learn to understand how they secrete the hormones that affect our physiological make-ups. In the future pathologists may watch the progress of Bright's disease, of tuberculosis in a piece of lung, of endocarditis in a heart of arteries hardening.

At last the process of aging can be studied in blood and tissues. Carrel himself is convinced that if only we can rid ourselves of toxic products most of us may hope to live a century or more. While it may take a generation or more to obtain the necessary additional facts, the goal must be not only new ways of protecting the human organism against disease, but also positive ways of improving the quality of tissue and blood. He once told the New York Academy of Medicine that some day it may be possible to put men in hibernating storage, activate them, return them to storage, etc., so that they may live several centuries!

It sounds fantastic, and yet the progress of science points directly to that goal. Why not Hilton's Father Perrault in "Lost Horizon" a reality instead of fiction? Perhaps, as Dr. Alexis Carrel put it, "the Utopias of today are the realities of tomorrow."

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THE LIFE SYMBOL

Wrappings fell away and there was revealed incredible loveliness . . .

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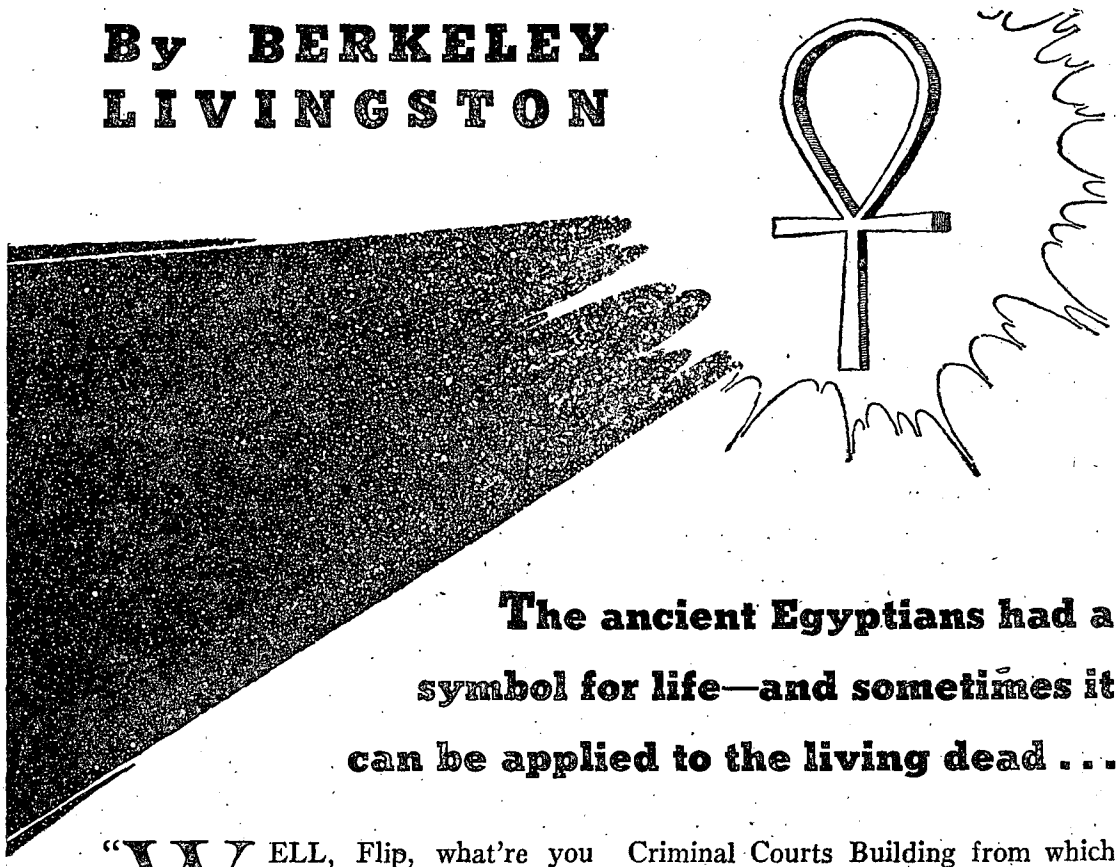
By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON



The ancient Egyptians had a symbol for life—and sometimes it can be applied to the living dead . . .

"WELL, Flip, what're you going to do now?" James Mallory asked.

Flip Donahue cocked a weather eye at the bright June sky and answered:

"Y'know, Jimmy, maybe it was a good thing, this getting knocked off."

"How's that?" Donahue's lawyer asked.

"Well, f'r ten years now, I been makin' book in the Loop. Day in, day out. No rest. Now don't misunderstand me Jimmy, I ain't complainin'. I been makin' heavy sugar: you know that. But f'r a long time now I ain't been satisfied. Pay off this guy; see that guy; get knocked off Tuesday; fifty buck fine. Not so good Jimmy. Too much heat. Now this reform campaign. More trouble. And then yesterday. Hell! I'm glad it happened! I'm gonna take a vacation, see."

They were standing in front of the Criminal Courts Building from which they'd just come. Flip had been arrested the day before on the charge of operating a gambling establishment. It wasn't his first arrest. Usually he paid the fine imposed and returned to open up for business again. But this time the law had invoked an old statute which carried a prison term on conviction.

It had taken all of the cunning of Mallory, Flip's lawyer, and one of the best in Chicago, to free Flip.

Flip, his eyes still uplifted to the blue, continued:

"Yep. Me f'r the fresh air. The country. Y'know, chickens, trees, grass—and no cops. Gonna be heaven I tell ya, Jimmy."

Mallory smiled down affectionately at the halfpint bookmaker. Flip had always been a favorite of the lawyer's. He knew his background. Born in the

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slums, Flip had, by hard work and sharp observance of what makes for wealth in the city, made his way up the ladder of success.

He wasn't in *Who's Who*, or the daily society columns. But among the sporting element of Chicago's Loop, Flip Donahue stood ace high as an honest bookmaker and true friend.

"Aren't you afraid you'd be out of your element, Flip," Mallory said kiddingly. "After all these years in the Randolph Street hot spots, you're going to feel lost without noise, smoke, whiskey and the rest."

"Nah!" Flip was positive. "Look, Jimmy. This jerk jacket I'm wearin'. A half C it cost me, at Mosel's on Michigan."

Mallory gave the casual jacket an admiring glance. Of brown camel's hair, it fit the slender torso of Flip, as though he had been poured into it.

"So what?" asked Mallory.

"So this! Why do I get it? 'Cause some guy who's all flash comes in the joint with a dame. Y'know, all talk —and half-buck bets. So he asks where I buy the *rag* I'm wearin'? *Rag!* I spent a C and a half f'r the suit I had on. Hell, I don't mind but the broad giggles. That gets me. So I get mad and trot down to Mosel's and drop five bills there."

"Well, what are you trying to prove?"

"That I need a vacation. I'm losing my sense of right or wrong. In other words I'm gettin' punchy from listenin' to those guys. I gotta get away."

MALLORY looked at him sharply Flip's sharp, pleasant features were screwed up in a look of disgust. His hands were clenched in the depths of his pockets. His eyes held a bleak look as he peered up at the sky, as if in the blue above was the answer to some question he'd asked.

"When are you leaving?"

"Tonight!"

Abruptly, Flip brought his gaze to meet Mallory's. The lawyer was amused at the odd look of indecision in the blue orbs peering at him. He knew why that look was there. Here was a man, born and raised in an atmosphere of city life; who had inexplicably decided to forsake it for the unknown. And the unknown frightened him. Malory could see it in the others eyes.

"Think I'm nuts, don't you, Jimmy?" Flip queried.

"On the contrary, I think it's a good idea. Only don't act as though you were departing on a polar expedition. It's not as bad as all that. Good Lord, Flip, you've needed a vacation for a long time! Tell you what. I've a friend who has a farm up in Michigan. I'll wire him and let him know you're coming. Save you the trouble of hunting for a place. And believe me, Tom Gorton's farm is really in the country.

"By the way, Flip," Mallory had thought of something else, "how's the finance department?"

"It ain't, Jimmy. I went tapped yesterday."

Mallory looked at him, open mouthed.

"Tapped? I thought—"

"You thought wrong, Jimmy. Y'see, I been taking daily double bets. And they took me yesterday for six grand."

"Where did you get the money for me?"

"Oh that. Well, I had a thousand or so in reserve. Looks like I'll have to turn honest when I get back to work," Flip quipped, as they started for Mallory's car.

NILSON, Michigan, was representative of most towns in that part of

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the state. The business section was built along the paved state highway which bisected the town. At one end was the railroad station; the other end, the huge general store.

Flip Donahue, his two suitcases beside him, stood under the station marquee. He was waiting for the man Gorton had wired would pick him up there.

He gave the town an appraising look. Heat waves danced on the shoulders of the highway. Dust-covered cars lined the streets before the stores. Farmers, usually accompanied by wife and children, walked slowly and heavily about. The town had a quiet air of content and well-being about it. Flip Donahue felt at peace.

Then a small, open-bodied truck skidded across the gravel of the roadway and came to a halt beside Flip. A head was thrust through the open cab window and a voice said:

"Guess you're the man I'm supposed to get."

Flip looked his surprise. He had expected a man, not this beautiful blonde creature who was staring so quizzically at him. Not that Gorton had menioned a man; it just hadn't occurred to Flip that the "someone" might be a woman.

He smiled and she returned the smile.

"Guess you are. Get in," she invited him into the truck.

He watched her admiringly, as they drove. She was dressed in blue slacks and white rayon blouse. Her wealth of blonde hair was tucked neatly into a gayly colored bandana. Every now and then a strand would escape from its prison and Flip felt an almost overpowering desire to touch the fine, golden-colored strands. She kept her eyes on the road ahead as she talked:

"So you're a friend of Mr. Mallory's. Gee, he's nice, isn't he?" Her voice held laughter and gaiety. Flip was thrilled. And strangely tongue-tied. He was satisfied just to sit there and listen.

"Any friend of Mr. Mallory's is a friend of Dad's," she went on. She gave him a sidelong look. "S'matter? Cat got your tongue?"

"N-no," he stuttered.

"Don't be afraid. I won't bite. Be here long?"

"Couple of weeks," he answered. He wondered how lips could be so naturally red. And so inviting.

"You'll like it," she announced matter-of-factly.

"I'm thinking I will," he replied.

THE Gorton farm proved to be an hour's drive from Nilson. She turned off the main highway and, after a mile of dirt road, she turned in at a gate in the fence which was the boundary of their farm.

Flip took in the surroundings with delight. It was evident Gorton was a successful farmer. The buildings, stock and acres of fruit trees proved it. She drove up to the house, stopped the car and got out. Flip too, got out.

His heart sank, as she came around the front of the truck. She was almost a head taller than he. In the cab she didn't appear so large. But standing beside him, as she was now, he was surprised, and pleased, by her Junoesque figure.

As Flip put it, "I like big women." And of that there was no question. She was big. Yet despite that bigness, she moved with a grace and lightness of carriage, astonishing to see. He watched open-mouthed, as she strode up the short flight of stairs leading to the house. She turned at the door and said:

"Come in, Mr. Donahue. This is

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going to be your home."

"Oh, sure," he said and followed her in.

Tom Gorton proved to be a heavy, hearty man.

"So you're the sharp city feller, Jim Mallory was writin' about? Well, we'll fatten you up, have no fear."

"Fatten me up?" Flip asked, surprised.

"Sure. That's what ye came up here for, wasn't it?"

"Uh—uh, sure, you bet—that's it," Flip quickly agreed and wondered *what* Mallory had written.

"Swell," said the girl, linking arms with him. "Lunch is on. Might as well start in now."

He followed her to the kitchen, at the rear of the house. It was large, light, airy and spotlessly clean. He had never seen anything like it before. Almost taking in an entire wall, was a huge kitchen range. And from it came the most delectable odors ever to strike Flip's nostrils.

Food was something Flip could take or leave alone. But now he was seized by a hunger so great, he could barely contain himself.

"Sit, Mr. Donahue," Gorton said from the depths of the huge arm chair he had dragged up from a corner of the kitchen.

Never had Flip tasted anything as delicious as that first meal. They were digging into their deep-dish apple pie, when the girl burst into unexpected laughter.

"My goodness," she said, after her laughter had subsided, "here I ride forty miles with Mr. Donahue and talk a blue streak and don't even tell him my name."

It proved to be Flora.

After lunch, Flip discovered the first of several Gorton habits. An afternoon nap. It was something new in his life: to take a nap at that time. He liked it. In fact at the end of a week, he liked everything about the Gorton farm. Particularly Flora.

Insofar as Flip was concerned, it was love! at first, second and last sight. Love in capital letters. And Flora felt the same way about Flip.

THEIR love followed its natural course. They were married in the little white church in Nilson on the morning of the day Flip planned to return.

"Well, son, what're your plans?" Gorton asked, as they were leaving the church. Flora had remained in the vestibule to receive her friends' congratulations.

Flip knew his plans were of the vaguest kind. But he also knew if he told Gorton that the old man would feel bad. It was a peculiarity of Gorton's not to pry into anyone's business. His son-in-law was no excepion. That and the fact Flip was a friend of Mallory's. Gorton had a world of respect for the lawyer. So Flip lied rather than hurt Flora's father.

"Oh," he replied airily, "I've got things lined up for me. Don't worry about a thing. I've got plenty of money."

"Well son," Gorton said, pulling a paper from his pocket. "Here's a little something. F'r a rainy day."

It was a deed to the farm.

Flip's face was red, as he attempted to hand it back.

"Nope," the old man refused "Can't tell. Might come in handy some day."

Before Flip could say anything more, Flora came out of the vestibule. He hurriedly stuffed the deed into his pocket. The last he saw of Tom Gorton, was his heavy figure climbing into the cab of the small farm truck. Then Flora had him under his arm and was

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saying:

"Gee, dear, I'm sort of frightened. My first trip to a really big city."

MISS JOHNSON, "the guardian of the outer portal," as Mallory described her, wrinkled her eyes in pleasure, as Flip Donahue walked in. She greeted him affectionately:

"Flip Donahue! And with a tan. Now I can go to my grave knowing I've seen everything."

He gave her a wide-lipped grin as he asked:

"The Great Mouthpiece in?"

"Yep. And mouthing, as usual."

He walked past her and into Mallory's office. The lawyer was posing in front of a mirror talking to himself. That's what it sounded like. Only Flip knew better. Mallory had a case and was rehearsing his address to the jury. Flip had seen him do it half a dozen times.

"Who's it today, Jimmy? Barrymore?"

Mallory smiled and replied:

"No. Just Mallory trying to convince a jury that a man can steal and still not be a thief."

"Good trick if you can do it."

Mallory came over to his desk and sat down behind it. Flip took one of the overstuffed leather chairs. They sat for several seconds, silently; just grinning affectionately at each other. Mallory broke the spell:

"Well Flip, how was it? How's Tom Gorton and his lovely girl?"

"Swell, Jimmy! Never felt better. And believe me, it's going to take a little while to get used to the sharp characters around here after seeing those simple farmers. As for the Gortons. My father-in-law was in the pink and my wife is planning to come up to see you soon. As soon as she's got our apartment fixed up."

"Your father-in— Flip! No! Well, you lucky so-and-so!" Mallory yelled, as he ran around the desk to grab Flip's hand. He continued to yell, as he pumped it up and down, "Well damn me! Congratulations! You're a lucky man, Flip."

"Thanks. I know it."

"Tell me how it happened, Flip?" Mallory asked in a more quiet tone.

"Dunno. One of those things. We met—and that was all. I knew from the second I saw her, she was the only woman in the world for me. Guess she felt the same way about me. Or maybe it was her cooking."

"Ha-ha. But you're right, there. Flora can certainly cook. Which brings up several points—"

"Later, Jimmy. First tell me. What's this?" Flip passed over the deed which Gorton had given him. Mallory picked it up and read it.

"Why, this is a deed, giving his farm —lock, stock and barrel—to you and Flora," he replied slowly. "What is this? How did it happen he did that?"

"Ya got me there, Jimmy. You know Gorton. Minds his own business, strictly. Never asks questions. Just once. When we were leaving the church. Wanted to know what my plans were."

"And what are they?"

Flip's chin took a determined tilt.

"Don't know yet. Just got in last night. Got this furnished place on the near North Side first. To tell you the truth, I've got just five hundred and eight bucks left. Not a hell of a lot. So I've got to get me a job. What's wrong with that?" he said angrily on seeing the look of disbelief on Mallory's face.

"Nothing, Flip. Only Flora is—well—I feel toward her as I would toward my own daughter. And I know you, Flip. You've been one of these

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'sharp characters', as you call them, for a long time. So you must understand my feelings, Flip."

FLIP got up and put an arm around the lawyer's shoulder.

"I do, pal," he said warmly. "And don't worry about her. She's my heart. Nothing but the best for her. Hell, Jimmy, you forget I once hustled papers and drove a truck."

"I remember."

"Well, hell then, I c'n do the same again can't I?"

"H'm. Yes, of course. But I've got a better idea, Flip."

"Yeah?"

"You know Jim Ferguson?"

Flip nodded.

"Well he's opening a club on Randolph Street. He needs a front man. And with your reputation, you'd be just the man for the job."

Flip shook his head.

"That's what I *don't* want! It'd just be getting back into that flash groove again. The short con and a fast hustle. No, Jimmy, I'm going to be a plain working stiff. The honest buck f'r me."

"Unh-unh, Flip. You've got the wrong attitude. I think it would be a hell of a good chance for you. And remember this, you want Flora to be happy, don't you? It'll be a lot easier on what you'll make with Ferguson."

Flip recognized the wisdom of Mallory's remark. He did want Flora to have the best. But the job entailed working nights. He wondered how she'd feel about it.

He told her what Mallory had suggested, after they'd had their dinner that night. She was curled up on the divan beside him.

"So what, honey?" she said. "Is it a good job? And will you be happy at it?"

He looked at her skeptically. If she had only been a city born girl. But she was country bred—up at dawn and in bed by eight. He made a silent prayer before giving in to her desire.

"Okay, baby," he said. "I'll see Ferguson tomorrow."

Ferguson was more than glad to see him. And when he learned the reason for Flip's visit, he wasted no time in making an offer. It was even more than Flip had expected. Two hundred a week salary and two per cent of the net profits. It was a deal.

THE two months which followed were the happiest Flip had ever known. He worked from eight to four in the morning. It permitted him a sufficiency of sleep and allowed them the afternoons to themselves.

Then one night, after they'd had dinner in the loop, she said:

"When are you going to let me come down and visit you, honey?"

"Why," he hedged, "I'd never thought about it. Sometime soon, baby."

"Why not tonight?"

He thought to himself: "Why not? Poor kid doesn't get around much." He said: "Sure, baby. Might as well show you the joint."

Her large blue eyes opened wide when she stepped into the Gilded Paradise, Ferguson's place.

"My goodness," she trilled, "you didn't tell me it was like this, Flip."

He looked at her and felt suddenly proud. This beautiful creature was his wife. His!

"Like it?" he asked.

"Oh! I love it! It's like, well, like being in Paradise, I guess."

Flip had never thought much about it, one way or the other. Now he tried to see it the way she did. He had to admit it was a great job of decorating.

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The designer had created an open air scene. The entrance to the floor proper was reached by either stairway or elevator. Then you found yourself on the uppermost of a number of terraces which led down to the stage floor. Tropical trees, all of them gilded, lent an exotic effect. The tables were set beneath the spreading branches.

"We're a little early, baby," he said, glancing at his wrist watch. "I'll get you a ringside table first. Hey, Artie!" he called to the head waiter, who had just come in.

"Yes, Mr. Donahue?"

"Look Artie. This is my wife—Mister Slate, honey, is the head waiter," he said introducing them.

Slate bowed his acknowledgment.

"Get her a good table, Artie. And see she gets whatever she wants."

"Yes sir! Will you step this way, Mrs. Donahue?"

Flip knew he shouldn't feel the way he did. But he couldn't help it. He was sorry to see how thrilled she was. He'd rather she didn't feel that way. He shrugged off the feeling and went into his office to change into his tuxedo. Just as he was ready to return to the floor, Ferguson walked in. His greeting was hearty:

"Hi, Flip. Nice crowd tonight. Got to admit you're doing a swell job."

"Thanks, Jim," Flip smiled warmly at the praise. "Giving it the best I got."

"That's fine. You know me, Flip. I'll see to it that you'll get what you want."

"I know that."

He looked at Ferguson, appreciation in his glance. Ferguson looked like a matinee idol. Women found him irresistable. Oddly enough, most men liked him also. But Flip knew several things about him the general public was in ignorance of. Beneath the exterior of bluff heartiness and cordiality, there was a cold, egotistic heart. Flip knew only too well that had the Paradise business fallen off under his management, if only for a short time, Ferguson would have let him go, without a second thought. So far, however, Ferguson was more than pleased. And somehow, his manner conveyed an appreciation that Flip felt was insincere. Yet so great was the man's magnetic power he almost convinced Flip of his sincerity.

THEY walked out together. The first floor show was on and Flip hurried down to where his wife was sitting. Artie had given her the best table in the house. On the ringside, she was able to see the show, without having to peer over or around other customers.

"Hi, baby," he greeted her, as he sat down at the table. "Like it?"

He could see she was too thrilled to answer. He smiled to himself. She was like a big kid, seeing her first circus—and loving it. The house lights suddenly went dim. She looked questioningly.

"That's for the big number. Sarawa."

"Sarawa?"

"Yeah. The famous stripper. She's what brings in the suckers. She gets four hundred a week. Worth every penny of it, too."

"Stripper? What's that, Flip?"

"Sorry, baby. Forgot you're new to such things. Well, guess the best way to describe her act would be to say, she gets all that money because she can take off her clothes—uh, artistically."

Flora still looked puzzled, however. Then Sarawa came gliding onto the floor. It was instantly apparent she was *the* favorite of the night club audience. The applause was almost deaf-

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ening.

She posed for a second, a slender, dark-haired girl, gleaming body oiled; an exotic creature in the single blue spotlight playing on her. Then a drum began to beat—a trumpet and clarinet started a melodic accompaniment and the rest of the band joined in. She moved sensuously and gracefully about the floor.

Flora wondered what made her such a favorite. Then she saw—and realized. Sarawa had been wearing a strange costume that seemed to consist of nothing but large feathers. And as she danced about, she began to pluck these feathers. In a few seconds there were only three feathers left to the costume. Two covered her breasts and the third served as a G string. The song ended, just as she reached the wings. Then while the trumpet man blew a single wild chord, she removed the feathers hiding her breasts and stood for a second in full view of the audience. Then she disappeared from view. There were no encores.

"You mean she gets four hundred dollars a week just for that?" Flora asked in amazement.

"Sure," said an unexpected voice. "Don't you think she's worth it?"

They looked around. Jim Ferguson was standing by their table. His teeth gleamed white, as he smiled down at Flora. Flip arose and introduced Ferguson. He had a feeling of displeasure on seeing the other man sit down at the table.

"So *you're* Flip's wife." He turned to Flip and said, "What's the idea, you sly dog? Keeping something as lovely as your wife in hiding."

Flip's voice was sharp, when he answered:

"I don't like my wife to come to places like this. She doesn't belong here."

"Flip!" Flora remonstrated, dismay in her voice. "What are you saying?"

"Nothin' but what I'm feelin'," he answered.

Ferguson grinned crookedly, arose and excused himself.

She became angry:

"What do you mean, I don't belong here? What am I—a child? What'll Mr. Ferguson think?"

"I don't give a damn! And I meant that, about your not belonging here. You look as outa place in this joint as a—well," he was stuck for a comparison, "well like a rose in a weed patch."

She was silent. He could feel her anger. He had never seen her angry before. It made him uneasy. She arose, suddenly and started up toward the upper terrace.

"Wait, Flora," he said contritely, following her. "I'm sorry. Guess I lost my—" He saw it was useless. She wasn't paying any attention to him. She drew many a curious—and admiring—glance, as she strode up the camouflaged steps. He watched her disappear into the foyer, then turned, anger burning deep within him, to seek Ferguson.

He didn't know why he was so angry. Perhaps it had been the open look of admiration Ferguson had bestowed on her. But he didn't succeed in finding the owner.

IT WAS a thoroughly miserable Flip, who walked into his apartment that morning. Breakfast and Flora were waiting for him, as usual. Her manner and kiss was no different from what they had always been. It wasn't till he was ready to go to bed, that she struck the first wrong note.

"Look dear," she said, bringing a fashion magazine to the bedside. "Don't you think I'll look good in this?"

She pointed to an illustration. It was that of a model showing a rather

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daring evening gown. It was the first time she had shown any awareness of fashions. He tried to be pleasant.

"Sure, honey. But isn't it kinda' strong on the undress side?"

"No, I don't think so. Besides I have the figure for it."

"You—have—the — figure—for—it?" Who told you that?"

She looked startled. And he knew someone *had* told her that.

"Ferguson," came her bland reply.

"Ferguson? When did you see him?"

"In the foyer. We talked for a few moments."

"Yeah? And how come he got to talking about your figure?"

"I don't know Flip. But he did say something about—well—I'd set off an evening gown."

Again anger bit Flip.

"All right," he blazed. "Go ahead! Buy what you want. I don't care."

With that he turned from her and buried his head in the pillow.

She was gone, when he awoke. It had been a hell of an evening, he reflected. Two quarrels. And for what. Jealousy. Hell! He was going to apologize when she came back. Yeah. She could get all the dresses she wanted. Only, she didn't come back!

When he did see her again, it wasn't where he thought it would be. She was sitting at the same ringside table they had the night before. Ferguson was with her! Flip walked over to them. His face held no expression whatever. They were so intent on each other, they didn't know he was there. She saw him first. Her eyes lit up as she said, in happy tones:

"Flip! How do I look?"

HE LOOKED her up and down. She had bought the dress in the magazine. His subconscious mind noticed how well it fitted her. Her golden-blond hair had been to a hairdresser, also. Two empty champagne glasses were on the table. The bottle, half empty, was in its bucket of ice.

"Hello, honey," he said. He thought he had spoken aloud. But the words came out in a whisper.

"Hello, Flip," Ferguson greeted him heartily. "Say, your wife is a great kid. I've been listening to her tell me about that farm up in Michigan—"

"Shut up," came Flip's whispered command.

Ferguson sat erect at the words.

"What're you doing here?" Flip asked her. She saw his face, set in lines of anger. She had never seen it that way before.

"I thought I'd come down and see you," she answered, evenly. "And now that I've seen you, I think I'll stay and see that woman dance again."

"Why?"

"Because I've got an idea."

"Whatever it is, it stinks."

"Flip! Take it easy!" Ferguson broke in.

Donahue's lips twitched in a wry grimace. Then his bony fist crashed into Ferguson's face. The blow only jarred the heavier man. For a second it was a frozen tableaux: the grim, waiting Flip; his wife, tense, yet unafraid; and Ferguson, eyes ablaze, a trickle of blood sliding down the curve of his chin.

Flora broke the spell. She arose and slapped Flip sharply once, and again. He remained frozen. Not even his eyes blinked at her sudden and unexpected action. He was waiting for Ferguson. Ferguson wiped the blood from the corner of his lips with a napkin.

Then speaking as casually, as if he were ordering coffee, he said:

"Get out, you tout! And don't come back! Because if you do—"

Flip pivoted on his heel and walked

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away. Nor did he turn to see whether she was following.

THE next month was the most tortured he had ever known. He had gone back to their apartment packed a grip with some clothes and moved to a small hotel. He got a job as houseman with a small bookie on the near North Side.

Days passed. But the pain which he felt—the longing, remained. As time went on he realized what a fool he had been. There was no reason for what had happened. He had played the fool. Then one night his hunger for her became too great. He went to see her.

She was in. The door opened to his knock and she was there before him. Her eyes became luminous, when she saw who it was.

"C-come in," she whispered.

He walked past her, his eyes taking in everything in the room. Nothing had been changed. He sat down in his favorite chair. Peace flooded his soul.

"How are you, Flip?" she asked. There was a tremor to her voice.

"Swell! Sure, swell," he answered. Then he broke, "Ah, what's the use? You know how I feel. Like hell—but I guess it's too late to cry about it."

She didn't answer.

"Well, honey," he went on. "How's with you?"

"Pretty good, Flip."

"Yeah. That's good. Workin'?"

"Uh huh. At the Gilded Paradise."

"So Ferguson made the grade, eh?"

"Ferguson! Ferguson! That's all that's on your mind. All right, then. It is Ferguson. He's giving me my chance. I'm going to do what I've always wanted to do. Dance!"

He looked at her in astonishment. Dance? It was the first he'd heard of it,

She read what was going on in his mind.

"I suppose you think it strange," she asked. "That I should want to dance. Remember what I said when we got on the train? My first trip to a big city. Well that was dad's fault. He didn't like cities. All my life I wanted to get away."

"Is that why you married me?" Flip asked softly.

"No. I loved you." Her simple statement was more convincing than any action.

"Men used to pass me by at the country dances. Oh, they wanted to mush with me. But dance, uh uh. I was too big. Well, Ferguson doesn't think so. He's putting me on next week. And I'll tell you something else. He's in love with me."

"Does that mean so much?"

"It does. I thought you'd understand. But you didn't. He does."

Flip saw the error of her position. "Oh honey, don't be a fool! You weren't meant f'r that stuff. Break it off. Let's try again."

"No!"

He recognized the finality in the word. There was nothing left to say.

HE READ of her opening night. She got rave notices. One the most extravagant, read:

"The Gilded Paradise, Jim Ferguson's oasis for the thirsty on Randolph Street, featured a new exotic parader last night: Florette. The gal is terrific. From the way the boys and girls went for her, it looks like she's in for a long stay. This scribe hopes so. It's been a long time since a body like that has been around."

Then he read a column by another columnist:

"Florette, the new charmer at the Gilded Paradise is getting herself a fine list of phone numbers. It reads like Who's Who on LaSalle Street. But the

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number one boy in her heart is Jim Ferguson. Looks like hubby, Flip Donahue, ex-bookie and man about Randolph Street, is going to be given a fast brush."

That almost killed him. He wasn't the kind to take a drink. But he no longer cared whether he worked or not. He got into the habit of taking long walks. The brisk, autumn air seemed to do him good.

One day he found himself in the Field Museum. His mind, as usual, was back in the days he had spent with Flora. Someone jostled him and he became aware of his surroundings. He was standing before an upended mummy case. He looked at the inscription on the case.

"Hotesit, favorite dancer at Pharoah's court. Fourth Dynasty. Considered the most beautiful woman of her time."

Below it were a series of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

He looked at the bas-relief features. He couldn't see anything beautiful in them.

"So you were beautiful, eh? Well, baby, you should see my wife. Alongside of her you're a bag. She's a dancer, too. A favorite at the court of King Jim Ferguson," Flip spoke aloud.

A gong sounded and a uniformed guard came through the corridor, calling:

"Closing time, folks. Closing time."

Flip lingered for another second, then started out. He hadn't taken ten steps before he became conscious of a strange sound behind him. As if sandaled feet were rasping on the marble floor. He paused for the barest instant—and the sound ceased. Again he started off and again he heard the sound. This time he whirled about. And felt the hair rise at the back of his neck.

There before him, was the girl of the mummy case! He knew it was she. She was trailing the wrappings behind her.

He felt rooted to the floor: unable to move, even to turn from watching her approach. It wasn't a *woman* approaching. Her steps were the thundering, awesome steps of the marching centuries.

She stood before him and the centuries were bridged. For an instant he *felt* the warmth of a desert sun; saw a sluggish green river; saw crocodiles and ibises; saw strangely dressed people. . . .

Then she spoke and the spell was broken.

"Most gracious and highborn, I thank thee. Thou hast relieved me of the spell of the Priests."

HE COULD only stare at the luscious morsel of femininity standing before him. Her body, from throat to heels, was covered by the sheerest bit of veiling Flip had ever seen through. He felt a flush of embarrassment creep over his throat and face.

Then she was kneeling at his feet.

"Hey," he squalled, "stop it! Get away from there."

She was trying to kiss his feet. He jumped backward several steps in alarm.

"What'cha tryin' to do?" he asked confusedly. He could *see* what she was trying to do.

"Hotesit is thy slave," she said, her lips curling sweetly in a smile. "Do what thou wilst with her."

He looked about him fearfully. The corridor was deserted. Darkness had already begun to gather in the corners. His hands went up in a defensive gesture.

"Now look, babe," he said, backing slowly away from her, "you'd better crawl back in that case, see, or there'll

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be trouble. An' I got enough troubles, without you." Again the backward leap, as she arose and stepped toward him. "Now look, sister, I ain't got time to fool with you, please, please—" She stood before him, looking up into his eyes. He turned and started to run and she said, "Wait!"

The single word made him stop.

"Thou hast broken the spell which bound me. Now I am thy slave, as I was Pharaoh's. Command me to thine bidding."

Flip gave up, then. The mystery of the mummy case was something he couldn't solve. He only knew that this strange creature was insisting she was his slave. He also knew that if the attendant should happen by then, there would be hell to pay. And he didn't have the price. He acted without hesitation.

Gathering up the trailing wrappings the girl had left behind, he then rolled them up into a ball and thrust them into the open case. An odor, pungently aromatic, permeated the sarcophagus. He banged the door closed and with a muttered imprecation came back to Hotesit. She was waiting, calm and expectant, for his desire. He had only one single desire. To get her out and leave her somewhere—anywhere—but preferably where he'd never see her again.

He removed his topcoat and flung it about her. No one seemed to think it strange to see an exotic looking girl, dressed in a man's topcoat and wearing foreign sandals on her bare feet, accompany a man who was dressed somewhat thinly for the weather. At least they received no more than cursory glances from the few brave souls who dared the chilly lake front breezes.

The sales girl at the large department store on State Street seemed curious, however. Flip had remembered it was Monday, and the department stores would be open in the evening. He had hailed a cab on the Drive and directed the driver to take them to one of the stores. Then it was that he realized the responsibility he had suddenly acquired. He could have washed his hands of the whole business. But, as if she were the stimulus, the probing needle to an awakened conscience, he knew he could not leave her.

A tall, slender girl detached herself from a group of girls and approached the odd looking couple. She stood before them, a cold look of disapproval on her face.

"Er—Miss," Flip began uncomfortably, "look. I'd like to—er—get some clothes for this girl. Y'know, dresses and a coat and some—er—underthings . . ."

He stopped. The salesgirl was looking at Hotesit. Her eyes were wide and her lips were chewing on words which wouldn't come out. He turned to see what was wrong. A low cry of pain was wrung from him. Hotesit, looking her demurest, had let the topcoat slip to the floor.

"No! No!" he moaned, as he hastily put the topcoat about her again. "Not here!" He appealed to the salesgirl. "You've got dressing rooms, haven't you?"

"Yes sir." Her manner of icy indifference was gone. This was a situation that had never happened before. Quickly she led Hotesit to one of the dressing cubicles. There was a period of confused activity. Then the door to the dressing room opened and Hotesit came out.

Flip gasped. The salesgirl, assisted by several others, had worked wonders Hotesit had in a space of several minutes undergone an amazing transformation. She was now dressed in modern clothes.

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She judged correctly the look in Flip's eyes.

"My Lord approves?"

"And how! Well, Miss, what's the charge?"

He gulped when she told him. He knew this store was noted for its fancy prices. But—two hundred dollars! He had that much. And more. But he had intended it to last a long time. Sighing resignedly, he paid the girl. Then, with Hotesit in tow, he left.

MIDNIGHT. Flip looked down at Hotesit, sitting on the floor before him; the strange exotic past, dressed in modern clothes. He had brought her to his hotel and installed her in a room there. How it was that he had begun to talk about Flora and himself, he didn't know.

He had sat down and she sat down also, on the floor. He had remonstrated with her:

"Nix, baby. You ain't home now. Get up and use a chair."

She had said nothing, nor had she changed her seat. Suddenly, he had begun to think of Flora. And Hotesit said:

"My Lord is troubled of mind."

It hadn't been a question. She knew. And in her flat statement, Flip heard something else. The command to tell her of his trouble. It was midnight; he had talked for two hours. Nor had Hotesit interrupted him, not even once. Now he sat silent, emptied of words and feelings. Suddenly the girl spoke.

"So it was with Pharoah. When he was troubled, he too would unburden himself to me. I had the strange power, then. The priests called me a sorceress and hated me. They hated me because of what I could do for Pharoah. Perhaps that strange power is still with me."

Flip sat back, relaxed and content, as though in talking to this girl he had taken off the burden that lay on his soul. What was more, he had returned to his normal, shrewd thinking. He regarded her closely, wondering what there was about her, that had helped bring about his return to normalcy. Her reference to Pharoah, priests and a past life didn't make sense to him.

He recalled again the scene in the Field Museum. He hadn't *seen* her step from the sarcophagus. He heard a strange sound; turned, and there she was. The case was open; mummy wrappings lay on the floor between her and the case. But *had* she stepped from it. He didn't *know!*

He had to admit she looked like the bas-relief. That is there was a semblance. But the warm human at his feet had a beauty and personality only hinted at on the stone case.

Her eyes, for example. They were luminous and amber-colored, like a cat's. He remembered the breath-taking beauty of her perfectly formed body. As a man, he was thrilled. Yet he had the feeling, far back in his mind, she but wanted to be a—well, for want of a better word—*friend.*

She broke into his thoughts:

"My Lord has accepted me: and his slave is grateful. He is in sore trouble. Let not his soul be wearied. His slave is from a race that knew the mysteries of all things. Know this, my Lord and Master. I cannot be here long. The spell cast upon me is timeless. But through the ages, men like you will break that spell. And then for a short while, I will have surcease from that—" She stopped and came erect.

FLIP had a distinct feeling of pleasure in watching her come to her feet. He wondered why. After all, it was just a simple, natural movement. Yet when ***she*** stood up, it was such a syn-

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chronized fluidly graceful movement that it thrilled the senses.

"I was the greatest dancer in Egypt," she said. And smiled.

Flip was startled. He had just thought what a fine dancer she'd make. Seemingly, she had read his mind. She walked to the lone window of the room and stared down into the street. Flip was reminded of something.

"Look, baby," he said, as he arose and started for the door, "better go to sleep now. I'll pick you up in the morning and we'll see about a job for you."

She turned and walked toward him.

"Take me to this place where your wife dances. I want to see her."

"Hey! Nix!" he remonstrated. "Let's forget that. Don't go getting any screwy ideas you c'n fix things. Besides, I don't want your help."

She smiled up at him.

"She does, though." It was a statement of fact.

He shook his head doggedly.

"No!" She knows what she's doing."

She said:

"Look into my eyes!"

"So all right," he said resignedly. "I'll look into your eyes." Anything to humor this dame. His annoyance disappeared quickly, however.

Her eyes were amber. Clear, deep pools of glowing yellow. And so deep! It was like looking into a pool of golden water. *Figures, hazy, now clear, were moving there.*

He wondered where he'd seen these people before. That man—his dress, face—all so familiar. Flip looked deeply into the eyes of the girl and, as if it were a dream, saw marbled halls, strangely dressed people and a woman dancing. The scene became more vivid, moved closer until he felt he was a part of it. Then he recognized the dancer. It was Hotesit.

He could not hear the music. Nor did he see the musicians. Yet she danced. Her torso bent, twisted and swayed seductively, alluringly, invitingly. The dance was sex manifest. Flip saw the reactions of the audience.

THAT man on the throne. He sat, an elbow on the throne-arm, his hand supporting his chin, and watched with brooding, intense look. Beside him, on a smaller throne, sat a woman. There was no admiration in her glances. Hate, wild and uncontrolled, gleamed in her dark orbs. Behind her, slightly to her right, stood a man. Flip recognized him instantly. These others were half-familiar, as shadowy substances sometimes met in a dream world. But Flip *knew* the man behind the throne. It was *Ferguson!*

He was dressed strangely, for Ferguson. Still his clothes were no different from most of those who watched. Richer, more colorful, perhaps. But the same cut. Then Flip saw his eyes. The hate of the woman was but a shallow jealousy, compared to the all-absorbing madness of Ferguson's hate. With his eyes he killed the dancer a thousand times. Then Flip saw the face of the dancing girl. And was amazed.

For on it he expected to see reflected the emotions which her dance instilled. Her face, instead bore a look of aloof disregard for all except the man seated on the throne. She danced for him alone.

Suddenly the man who stood behind the woman stooped and whispered something to her. She smiled at his words and he joined her. Her smile grew broader, broader—and Flip felt himself drawing closer. He tried with all his will power to hold back. He felt himself growing smaller and smaller as he approached the huge, red cavern of the man's mouth. The red flesh

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stretched limitless distances above and below. Flip knew what it was—a trap. He had to escape. If only he could scream. Perhaps these others would see him then. Just as he was drawn past the stalactites of teeth, he uttered a single, hoarse, "help!" and someone answered:

"Hello, Donahue."

IT WAS as if a hypnotist had snapped his fingers, releasing Flip from a spell. He looked about him, wonderingly. This garish scene was familiar to him. He was in the exotic foyer of the Gilded Paradise. There was someone standing before him. A face swam before his dazed, uncomprehending eyes. It was Artie, the head waiter. Artie said:

"Wha'ssa matter, Flip? Sick?"

Flip snapped back to normal at the question.

"Nah!"

Even as he answered, he took a quick look about. Hotesit stood beside him! Before he could ask how all this had transpired, Artie asked:

"Table?"

"Yeah. F'r two." Then to Hotesit, "C'mon babe, I got questions."

Artie remembered Flip's fondness for the background. The table he gave them was perfect. It permitted them a view of the floor yet gave them a small measure of privacy. Flip wasted no time in coming to the point.

"Look, babe," he said, "what's all this about? Who are you? What d'ya do to me back there in the apartment?"

Her smile showed thin rows of perfect teeth.

"I am Hotesit," she replied. "My tale can be told briefly. I was the favorite dancer in Pharoah's court. More, I was *Pharoah's* favorite. Anatis, Pharoah's consort, and Ramatu, the high priest, were jealous of me. Ramatu cast a spell upon me. But, because I am one of the holy ones, I could not die! So through eternity, there will always be one who will awaken me. And, like you, he will use the words which break the holy wrappings."

"What words are they?" Flip demanded.

"I was considered the most beautiful woman of my time. And the greatest dancer. Ramatu completed the spell by saying, "Until the time comes when another shall be called more beautiful or a greater dancer." He knew it would not happen in Pharoah's reign."

Flip knew little of Pharoah or of the early Egyptians. But he did know what his eyes had seen, although he didn't understand. He had that inexplicable feeling again that this girl was going to help him. He listened in rapt silence as she concluded:

"I am of Ishtar's sect. It is my duty to help those in love."

A fanfare of trumpets broke into their talk. Flip turned startled eyes toward the stage. The Gilded Paradise had undergone a transformation since he had last seen it. It now boasted an actual stage. Previously the floor show had been performed on a polished section of the floor, level with the bottom row of tables. Flip saw something new had been added. A raised platform held a semi-circular stage. The opening number of the floor show was just coming on.

Flip consumed several bottles of beer during the next hour. Hotesit neither ate nor drank. Insofar as Flip was concerned, she lived on air. He saw that Ferguson had gone all out in his floor shows. A nationally famous comedian was the master of ceremonies. A well-known dance team shared honors with him. Ferguson had also added a chorus line of very pretty girls to the cast.

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FLIP showed only a casual interest in the floor show. Hotesit, however, displayed deep interest. She gave no indication of her feelings however other than a finger tapping on the table, as if she were keeping time with the band.

Flip's interest was centered more on the clientele. He was quick to note that Ferguson had gone all out to get the monied crowd and had succeeded. His wandering attention was called back to the floor show by an announcement the M.C. was making:

"And now, you lucky people, I take great pleasure in offering for your approval the finest piece of unrationed meat on our menu. That delectable and gorgeous hunk o' beef, our Blue Plate Special, *Florette!*"

The famous comedian was standing in a spotlight glow before a curtain that had been lowered across the stage. He sauntered toward the wings, as he closed his announcement and the curtain parted. Hotesit let out her breath in a long sigh when she saw what was revealed behind the curtain. Flip, too, gasped.

He had seen all this only a short time before. This or something very similar. He looked more closely then, and saw it was not quite the same. But the effect was. For there on the stage had been created the illusion of a court in ancient Egypt.

A Pharoah, dressed in authentic reproductions of the court costume, was seated on a throne. Surrounding him were a dozen men, representing the nobility. To one side, several musicians made music on stringed instruments. And before the Pharoah, a Fakir sat. He was blowing on a flute-like instrument. A reed basket was set between his legs. As he played, a strange thing happened.

A small triangular head appeared in the mouth of the basket. The head remained fixed, pointed in the direction of the player. Then, as he continued to make the piping sounds, the snake emerged entirely from the basket and slithered up to the squatting musician. Up over his legs it went; up and around his shoulders, neck, until it was in a loose coil around his throat. Then, with part of its body extended in front of the flute, it began a weaving movement, back and forth, in time to the music.

Flip was reminded of Hotesit, when she exclaimed in a low voice.

"Huh?" he said, his attention still taken up by the performance.

"It is nothing," she said. "But soon he will be through. Then someone will do the 'dance of love.' "

It was as though she had seen it before. The musician piped a few notes and the snake returned to the basket. The performer took his bows and moved off. Then the other musicians went into a strangely moving song. A veiled figure appeared in the wings. Flip felt his throat tighten. It was Flora. But a Flora he'd never known.

This was no country girl, dancing a routine taught to her in some dance studio. To the audience watching her every move, she was the figure of love incarnate. She swayed and dipped, each movement one of love's expressions. Flip's pulses pounded and his breath came fast and hard as the dance came to its end.

The applause was terrific. Flip was the first to admit it was warranted.

Hotesit surprised him by saying:

"It *was* well done. But well done only in the sense that it had been rehearsed well. She did not dance as if she felt the emotion of love tugging at her and forcing her to dance thusly. Understand?"

Flip shook his head. "Sorry, kid," he said. "I don't get what you're driv-

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ing at."

"You will," she answered. "You told me that once you were the manager of this place?

"Yes."

"Do you think you could become that again?"

He shrugged his shoulders. The question bothered him. He couldn't guess what was on her mind. "Well," he said hesitantly, "I suppose I could. But I'd have to eat crow. Not that I wouldn't, if I could get Flora back. It's all a question of how Ferguson feels.

"After all, he threw me out. I can't see the jerk taking me back so fast."

Hotesit digested this for a moment, then said:

"This Mallory. He has influence of some kind?"

Flip snapped his fingers. This dame wasn't only pretty, she was also bright in the skull.

"That's it baby!" he chortled. "Mallory. If he went to Ferguson, Ferguson wouldn't refuse him. That's the angle that'll do it for us."

MALLORY'S brow knit in concentration. He nibbled reflectively at his lip. He kept his eyes fixed on the blotter of his desk all the while Flip told him the story of Hotesit, and why he came to Mallory with his strange request. Of course it wasn't the truth. Flip realized it would have taxed Mallory's incredulity. Besides it would have involved Flip into the answering of questions that at present could not be answered.

At last Mallory looked up. Flip read the answer in his eyes and felt his heart leap. Mallory was going to do as they asked. However it wasn't to be as easy as they thought it was going to be. Ferguson had to be sold on the idea. It took a lot of selling. But Mallory succeeded.

. . . Mallory called Flip into his office one day and said:

"It took a lot of fast talk but I did it for you, Flip. Now don't for heaven's sake, get hot under the collar again and do what you did before. There's too much at stake."

"Not this time, Jimmy," Flip hastened to assure him. "I'm going to be a very good boy."

"Er—Flip," Mallory began hesitantly. "What about this girl?"

"Yes?"

"Just what does she plan to do? I can't see how she is going to—to . . ."

"Look, Jimmy," Flip broke in. "I'm just as much in the dark as you are. But I'll be damned if I don't believe she'll do like she says. Now don't ask me why I think that. I can't answer that. I just got a feeling that it's all going to end up okay."

"I hope so. Where is she now?"

"At her apartment. She made me buy her a phonograph and some records she picked out. Said she had to get some practice in."

"Umm. I don't know— Anyhow, Ferguson wants to see you this afternoon."

"I'll be as quiet as a mouse," Flip promised.

FERGUSON looked coldly at Flip.

"I'm doing this strictly as a favor to Mallory, Donahue, so don't forget it. Just one fast move and I'll have you thrown out—but for keeps this time."

"Don't worry," Flip assured him. "I just want a job. That's all. And to show you that I'm still in the groove, I've got a dancer for you that's going to be a show stopper."

"How interesting," a women's voice broke in.

It was Flora. Flip had to look twice to make sure. It had only been a mat-

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ter of a couple of months since he had seen her last. But the change was instantly to be seen. It was not for the best. She was dressed in the height of fashion. Flip had to admit the clothes she wore were set off to the best advantage by her superb figure. Yet he knew there was a wrong note there. It was to be seen in her face. Tiny lines had made their appearance: lines that gave to her face a tight look which told all too surely that Flora was not finding night life the wonderful heaven she had assumed it to be.

"Not that she's going to take Florrette's place, understand. But in her own way, this gal's pretty good," Flip said. He spoke directly to Ferguson. It was as if, after that first look at Flora he had been satisfied with what he'd seen.

"Jim," Flora cooed. "I don't see the need for *another* dancer, do you?"

Ferguson gave her a questioning look from beneath his eyebrows.

Flip went on, "Well, I suppose she's out then. Too bad, though. She's really got something."

"Who said she's out?" Ferguson asked.

"No one," Flip answered apologetically. "But Flora . . ."

"Never mind Flora," Ferguson said. "I'm telling you. Bring her down and we'll see what she's got."

Flora pouted and Flip felt like spanking her for it. Then he saw the look of fury in her eyes and knew that she was really hot about the deal he was making. Good. It was working out just as Hotesit had planned.

"Okay, boss," Flip said. "I'll bring her down for a rehearsal tomorrow. I guess I'll go back to work now. Been a while since I've been out front. Have to get used to giving the glad hand again."

He left then and Flora waited only until his footsteps were no longer to be heard. Then she said in a furious voice:

"What was the idea of that, Jim?"

Ferguson leaned back in his chair and gave her a sharp look.

"Why don't you stay out of my business?" he asked.

She gulped at the words. It left her speechless for a moment.

"Why—why, I—I—" she stumbled haltingly.

Ferguson leaned over his desk and said:

"Don't you think it's time you got smart to yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

"How long do you think you're going to keep making a sucker out of me?"

"A—a sucker? I don't know what you mean."

"Ah—stop playing country girl! You know what I mean. You don't think I made you a big name just because I liked your looks?"

Flora felt numb. This couldn't be! Yet it was all to be seen in his eyes and the set of his lips. As though he knew that she was afraid, he got up and came toward her. There was something in his face that frightened her. He had never acted like this.

"You mean you love me?" she asked.

Her words stopped him. He looked at her for a few seconds, then broke into sudden laughter.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said at last. "*That,* coming from you. As if that made any difference to you."

"But it does," she began and stopped. In her eyes there came a look of utter horror. As if she had suddenly realized something. She knew then what he meant. Slowly she turned and left the room.

"THIS is the girl I was telling you about, Jim," Flip said, introducing

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Hotesit.

Ferguson gave her an appraising glance. "Not bad, Flip," he said.

Hotesit looked her demurest. Flip grinned and said:

"Wait till you see her dance. Knock your eyes out."

"Yeah? Let's take a look now, then," Ferguson suggested.

She had brought her costume with her. It took Ferguson's breath away when she appeared on the stage. Never had he seen so revealing a bit of drapery.

"What's her name?" he asked as she went over to the orchestra to give them instructions on how she wanted her music played.

"Marla."

"If her dance is as good as her body, she's got a job," Ferguson promised.

Flip watched her dance with a great deal of interest. She had told him that she would put on a show for Ferguson. But she had not said what kind of a show. It was the oddest dance Flip had ever seen. There was no great amount of movement. But in every gesture of her body there was an invitation to partake of the pleasures of love. An invitation that was irresistable. Ferguson's eyes were moist with illy concealed desire when she ended her number.

"She's hired," he announced in a constrained voice. "Bring her to the office and we'll talk salary."

Hotesit, who had gone to change her clothes, after her performance, came out then and joined them.

"You're hired, baby," Ferguson said. "I was just telling Flip to bring you to the office and we'll talk terms."

Her eyes were downcast, as she said, "If you don't mind, I'll leave that to Mr. Donahue."

Ferguson looked from Flip to her, his lips pursing in thought. As if she was aware of what he was thinking, she said.

"He takes care of all my personal matters."

"What do you mean by that?" a voice intruded sharply.

It was Flora again. None of them had seen her come in from the wings. She had watched the whole dance from her spot of observation. Flip read the signs right. Those spots in her cheeks could only mean one thing—anger.

"Sure," he said, grinning broadly. "Marla's right. I'm her agent. You know . . ."

"I don't know," Flora said. "Would you mind explaining?"

"Nothing to explain," Flip said easily. "Just that. I take-care-of—"

Then Hotesit decided to throw oil on the blazing waters. She linked her arm with Flip's and said, "Shall we go now, dear?"

Oddly enough, Flora said nothing to that. But Ferguson did.

"Why don't you stay a few minutes, Miss Marla? I'd like to go over the details of our deal, if you don't mind?"

She looked questioningly at Flip, who nodded his head in agreement.

WHEN they got to the office, Flip found an excuse to leave the two alone. Flora had remained outside and he wanted to see her before she left.

She was just about to leave.

"Flo!"

"Yes?" Her voice was distant.

"Wait a minute. I want to talk to you."

"Does your friend mind?"

"Marla? She's all right."

"I can see that," Flora said, her voice showing the disapproval she felt.

"Look, honey," Flip said. "You got the wrong slant on this thing. There's nobody but you, see."

But her manner remained frigid.

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And without the courtesy of an answer, she left.

Flip was grinning broadly, as he watched her depart. So Flora was jealous. Well, that was nice. The first step in the plan had gone over well. He wondered how the girl was making out.

She stepped out of the office as he arrived at the door. The girl was smiling slightly. It was a good sign.

"He—tried to kiss me," she whispered.

"Did he?" Flip asked.

"No. Luckily for him."

"What do you mean?"

She didn't answer his question. Instead she said:

"I start tonight. And, for tonight, your wife will have the featured spot. But tomorrow, he promised that spot to me."

Flip's eyebrows went up. It was like Ferguson to pull something like that.

"Of course he doesn't know that I'm going to take that spot tonight. Nor does your wife. Do you think she can take what's in store for her?"

"She'll have to," Flip answered. His eyes were bleak in the thought of what it was going to mean to him.

Hotesit took his hand and squeezed his fingers lightly.

THE Gilded Paradise was never so crowded. Even the bar had its full complement of customers. Ferguson had placed emergency orders on posters advertizing his new discovery and had made personal phone calls to the proper places. Every one who was someone in the city was there.

Flip sat at a table with Mallory.

"What does she plan to do?" Mallory asked.

Flip shrugged his shoulders. He knew but he didn't want Mallory to know. He wasn't sure that the lawyer would approve. Flip, however, seemed confident of the success of the scheme.

The floor show began as it had the night before, with the well-known comedian acting as master of ceremonies. The first act was the dance team. The applause was only moderate, although Flip saw their work was superlative. But the audience had decided to sit on its hands until it saw what the new dancer showed.

Ferguson had decided to put Hotesit on first. She came as a distinct surprise, because there was no announcement to her entrance.

The band, led by the wail of the clarinet, broke into a melody that was set in a minor key. She had taught it to them in a few minutes, although they played it as though they had done it innumerable times.

Flip remembered that dance. It was the same he had seen, in what he had thought was a dream. Yet, somehow, it was different tonight. Not alone in that the cast of characters was different. But the mood was not the same. Then she had danced as if love was deep, profound, like a great river in its majestic sweep. She had shown but one side of Ishtar's face, the noble side.

Now her dance had as many facets as an excellently cut diamond. In one movement, she was love, exultant; supple body posed, breasts pointed passionately upward, her face a mask of passion. In another movement, she was the virgin maid, awakening to the full consciousness of love. Here she teased, and there was the fulfillment.

The audience sat spellbound. They were as if in a daze. Nor could Flip deny the power of her spell. Oddly enough, although he was as stirred as the rest, he saw the dance subjectively. As if he were a showman for whom Hotesit was on exhibition.

He started to excuse himself to Mallory, but noticed that the lawyer was

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as much in her spell as the rest. Nor did Mallory notice Flip leave the table. As Flip made his way to the wing of the stage, he caught Hotesit's eye. He wasn't sure, but he thought she favored him with a wink as he passed. He gave her an answering grin and continued to the wing in which he knew Flora was watching the act.

Flora, open-mouthed and wide-eyed, watched Hotesit dance. Flip saw in her every expression, the consciousness that in this new girl out there on the floor, was a threat to her every dream. More, Hotesit was a greater dancer than Flora could ever be.

Flip thought he had experienced every emotion in respect to Flora. But the emotion he felt now was new to him. For it was pity he felt. Yet that pity held love that was deeper than anything he had ever known. He didn't try to rationalize this new feeling. He only knew it was there, and was content.

She turned and saw him.

She smiled on seeing him and Flip felt his belly quiver at the sight of it. It was such a forlorn attempt at looking brave. He started toward her, with the intention of alleviating the hurt she had suffered, when there came to their ears the swelling sound of applause. A few seconds later, Hotesit appeared.

Instantly, Flora stepped to her side. Flip, not knowing what was on Flora's mind, came close to prevent any trouble that might arise. But there was no need for his action.

"My dear," Flora said, her voice low, "that was beautifully done."

Flip gasped. It was the last thing he had expected her to say.

"Thank you," Hotesit replied. And in her voice was that which told Flip she meant what she said, every word of it.

THEN Flora's head went up. The M. C. had just given her cue. She walked out to a silence that was the most painful thing Flip had ever known. It was as if the audience had said, "Well, let's see you do better than what we've just seen."

Flip's throat was dry, with sudden fear. Here was what Hotesit had planned. Her voice came to him dimly:

"Better that it should happen so, Master, than in any other way."

It was a cruel thing to do. But as Hotesit had explained, "It will seem hard and unnecessary, but believe me, I know the result will prove me right."

Then it came. First a few scattered laughs. Then a catcall and another and then it seemed the entire audience was laughing and demanding the return of Hotesit.

Flip looked out onto the stage and knew why the audience was reacting as they were. He was held spellbound by what he saw: the spectacle of a woman on the stage who had no idea of what she was doing. For it was all too apparent that Flora had lost whatever grace she might once have had. And it was a complete mystery to her how it had happened. It was not that she had forgotten the routine of her dance. It was rather in the clumsiness of her movements and the almost slapstick way in which she recovered from the slips she made.

Flip felt someone brush past him and saw Ferguson, his handsome face distorted in fury, call to Flora, demanding that she get off the stage. When she appeared before him, pale and distraught from the horror she had gone through, Ferguson hoarsely asked:

"What the hell did you think you were doing out there?"

"Jim! Honestly, I don't know what happened to me. It was just like I'd forgotten—"

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"Forgotten!" he screamed in fury. "Why, you tramp!"

Flip's hard fist drove whatever else he was going to say deep in his throat. Ferguson fell back, hands held before his streaming mouth. But Flip gave him no rest. The bitterness which had been damned up in him through the torturing months, was now let loose. And Ferguson, though larger and stronger than Flip, had no chance against the smaller man's fury. He could only wrap hands about his head and take the punishment Flip was so busily dishing out.

It was Flora who finally stopped Flip.

"Please, Flip," she begged. "He's had enough. Stop it now."

So great was his anger that he pushed her roughly aside before he realized who was pulling at his arms. And even then, he found time to deliver a last few punches to Ferguson's face.

The last blow knocked the cafe owner to the floor. Not till then did Flip desist.

Ferguson staggered to his feet and stumbled away in the direction of his office. Hotesit followed him.

"Flip," Flora began in a low voice.

"Later," he said bruskly, following Ferguson and the girl with his eyes. "Go on home. I'll see you later."

She turned without a further word and left.

"YOU shouldn't have done that, Flip," Mallory said.

Flip turned to the lawyer, who, suddenly missing Flip, had gone in search of him.

"Why not— Hell! You're right, Jim. I guess I lost my head."

"Worse, Flip. You may have lost your wife."

"Unh unh. I think she's smartened up, Jim."

Hotesit came out of the office just then, putting a stop to their conversation.

"Flip," she said in a low voice. "Will you take me away from here now?"

"Now? Sure. Where do you want to go?"

"To where you first met me."

. . . The Field Museum was a mausoleum of lifeless things in the cold light of the winter moon. Flip felt a shiver that was not from the cold go through him. He and the girl were on the topmost step of the huge gray building. She was wearing the same thin gossamer-like material under the overcoat he had given her to wear, until they reached the building.

He looked at her and realized that he had nothing to say.

"Well, Flip. I must say goodby now."

He stood beside her, a hard-bitten little man, with a tight drawn face and the marks of a great inner pain still etched on it. He stood silent beside her for the length of several minutes, lost in the thoughts of the bizzare happenings of the past few weeks, then realizing she had spoken to him, said:

"Yeah. I guess it's goodby all right. Seems funny. Me, the wise guy of Randolph Street, the guy who knew all the angles, standing here saying goodby to— a ghost! Sure, a ghost. And imagine me trying to explain you to the wiseacres on the drag. Hell! I can't even explain you to myself."

He had been talking, facing away from her, and with his last words, turned with a laugh—to find the steps empty. There was no need to look for her. She had gone back to that place from where she'd come.

Flip lifted a clenched fist to his forehead, as if to wipe away the memory of Hotesit and felt the hardness of some object within the fingers. He

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opened his hand and looked at what they held. A ring. Of antique design, it depicted a scarab holding within its horns, a peculiar symbol.

Flip knew nothing of the symbolism of the Egyptians. So he did not recognize the significance of what the ring held. He knew only that here was another mystery. How had it gotten into his hand? Then he remembered where he had seen it before. On Hotesit's finger. It just fit the little finger of his hand.

FLORA, face scrubbed to a shining brightness, wearing a housedress that somehow made her look like a child, faced Flip, as he crossed the threshold of the apartment. For the first time in a long time Flip was reminded of the girl he had met on a Michigan farm.

"Ready for some coffee, dear?" she asked.

It was as if they had never been apart.

Flip was content to have it so. But the kiss he planted on her lips was not the sort associated with the, "well, I'm home from the office," type of husband.

When at last he released her, she sighed and said:

"I've been a fool, Flip."

"Let's forget it, kid."

"All right, darling."

There was a silence of several minutes, while they repeated the performance they had gone through on Flip's entrance. Then Flora said in a small voice:

"Darling?"

"Yes."

"What about that girl?"

"What girl?"

"That dancer—Marla."

Flip knew better than to try to explain her to Flora. She would have either thought him crazy or said he was trying to make her think she was.

"Honey," he said slowly. "There's only one girl in this world for me. And I've got her in my arms right now."

She sighed deeply once again and said:

"I've got a surprise for you."

He looked at her expectantly.

"Remember dad's gift to us?"

Flip looked puzzled.

Flora pulled a folded paper from the bodice of her dress.

"Remember those apple dumplings I used to make for you?"

"Uh huh!"

"Well, Mallory told me that he received a letter from dad. It was a surprise letter. Dad didn't want us to see it. He's going to retire—and he wants you to use that deed he gave you."

Flip's mouth hung open. So what they'd always said to him when things weren't going good was going to be a reality. He was going to be a farmer.

And like it!

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Animals, two-by-two
surrounded him, and on
his knee, the chimpanzee, affectionately

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LARK ON THE ARK

By RICHARD CASEY

PROFESSOR Lucius Lavender opened the door with great dignity and ushered the news-reporter inside. If Bill Barnes was startled by the upheaval in Lavender's home, he tried not to show it. Crackpots were funny. Your best bet was to get a story and move out before they started to affect you.

Barnes wondered if he should bow to this gaunt, mild-eyed creature, whose ears seemed about to flap, but never quite got to it. He compromised by offering a quick nod of his head.

"I'm Bill Barnes, reporter from the News. We'd like a story about that ark you are building." He didn't add that this was the fifth "end of the world" story he had covered this year.

"Certainly," Professor Lavender said in a grave-yard voice, "please come with me. I resent somewhat your idea that you might find an ark here. I plan to remove myself and my animals from this doomed world with the help of a rocket ship."

Bill Barnes' eyes popped open alarmingly.

"A rocket?" He moaned, not knowing what else to say. "You've built a rocket?"

However, by this time Professor Lav-

Here is a new kind of ark—and a new way to be a Noah. Just imagine a rocket ship loaded up with animals . . .

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ender was off on a tour of the house.

The rooms they passed through on their trip to the rear of the house were bare of furniture. Several cages in each room held pairs of monkeys, rabbits and other small animals. The dining and living rooms were full of stalls in which there were horses and giraffes and other animals too numerous to mention.

"I'd like you to meet my assistant, Mr. Wilson," Lucius said.

A fat, dumpy individual came from the hall and approached Barnes. He would tip the scales at about three hundred, Barnes decided, and would roll in any direction very easily.

"*Real* name's Wilson," the mountain rumbled, "but call me Pudge."

"Please," Professor Lavender said in a discouraged voice. "No assistant of mine will be known by that name. Refer to him as Mr. Wilson, assistant to me on the expedition."

"Certainly," Barnes agreed, "anything you say. Now, if I can see that rocket ship . . ."

LUCIUS led the way through the small porch into the back yard. Barnes walked down the steps and stopped short at the edge of a deep hole that had been dug where the lawn once grew.

At least something was going on here that indicated hard work. The hole was about thirty feet deep and lined with concrete. The high fence around the yard kept it hidden from curious eyes. The blunt, circular nose of a rocket ship projected five feet above the rim of the hole.

Barnes turned to Professor Lucius Lavender, who was studying the rocket ship with nothing less than reverence.

"You mean this thing is going to fly?"

"Certainly," Lucius answered enthusiastically, "isn't it nice? I copied the lines from a Buck Rogers space ship."

Barnes gulped.

"You're going to take off in it?"

"Why not?" Professor Lavender stepped closer to him. "Papers will carry a forecast of fair and warmer for tomorrow. They're all crazy, you understand—crazy!"

Barnes backed away slowly, aware of the fire in Professor Lavender's eyes.

"Yes, I quite understand. You will be safe, of course?"

"Of course." The Professor's voice was rising steadily. "Tomorrow the rain will start. It will rain on and on for forty days and forty nights. My assistant and I will take off tomorrow morning for Venus. We will take our animals with us and start a new way of life on another planet."

"Quite an idea," Barnes agreed with little enthusiasm. He was secretly wondering how much powder it took to blow a rocket ship into space.

"I suppose you have everything all figured out?"

"Everything," Lucius Lavender repeated in a hollow voice. "The power will be supplied by TNT. We have it at the bottom of the pit right now."

Barnes turned and without much dignity hurried back toward the house.

"I guess that's all," he said. "I hope you have a pleasant trip."

"We could use another member for the crew," Lucius said hopefully.

"No, I guess I'll stay here and drown with the rest of them," Barnes said. "I get dizzy in high places."

In the living room, Pudge Wilson was putting fresh hay under the cow.

"I suppose you are anxious to get started on the trip?"

Pudge nodded his head very slightly as though he had given the trip no seri-

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ous thought.

"Guess so," he admitted. "They say on some of the planets, the air makes a man weigh only about fifteen pounds. Wouldn't that be something?" A gleam of hope came into his eyes.

Barnes took a last look at the great hulk of human flesh and agreed that it would.

Safe in the street he glanced back over his shoulder at the fenced in back yard. He didn't slow down until he had covered three blocks.

Professor Lucius Lavender and his over-sized assistant were going somewhere all right, with that TNT under them.

Barnes didn't think it would be to another planet.

PROFESSOR Lucius Lavender had planned well, but at the last minute Pudge Wilson ran into troubles that the partnership of Lavender and Wilson had not anticipated. The pair of full grown giraffes, purchased from the local zoo, were not designed to fit the rocket ship. That portion of the ship which was to house the animals was separated from the Professor's control room by a small hatchway. If the giraffes were in their proper quarters, they could only stand upright by pushing their heads through the hatchway to study the Professor gravely while he was at work. He was forced to decide that the giraffes would not be necessary in his new world. They were to be left behind. However, there was a perfectly fine collection of other animals: horses, ducks, cows, etc., that *would* fit the ship. Preparations were made to take off.

It was noon and the rocket ship was prepared for the flight. No one had shown the slightest interest in Lucius Lavender's enterprise. In fact, Bill Barnes had killed the story purposely so that no serious onlookers would lose their heads when the TNT exploded.

Professor Lavender managed to pull his assistant through the door of the ship with a more than normal amount of energy. With Pudge, came a copy of the evening newspaper. The weather report predicted fair and warmer for tomorrow.

"Just as I told you," Lucius said. "Poor souls, they know not that they face death in a few more days."

PROFESSOR Lavender climbed carefully into the control room and called for Mr. Wilson to follow. He waited in vain for Pudge's fat face to show through the hatchway. At last he walked across the tiny room and stared down into the well of the ship at Mr. Wilson and the animals.

"Are you coming up here?"

Pudge Wilson looked very sad.

"Professor, I guess you'll have to make this trip without my help. I came along to take care of the animals. You didn't figure on my size when you made that door to the control room. I could never get through that little hole even if I *did* trust the ladder that leads up to it."

And so it happened, when the rocket ship took off, Pudge Wilson was condemned to spend the entire trip with his animals.

Professor Lucius Lavender wasn't quite so sure of himself when he finally sat down at the controls.

"Get hold of something down there," he shouted, "and hold on. There may be quite a disturbance when the TNT explodes."

Something in Pudge's voice indicated that he didn't realize the full importance of this moment.

"I'm holding on, Professor," he cried in a plaintive voice, "but I ain't entirely sure I ought to be going, now that I've

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had time to think it over."

Then came a terrific explosion of TNT and Pudge's animal quarters turned to a hurling, yelling hodge-podge of flying fur. In the control room, Professor Lucius Lavender felt a delicious sleepy sensation pass through his body, and suffered a complete blackout. He would always remember his first sensation upon reawakening. The thing that surprised him most was that the ship was actually hurtling through space. When he shouted to Pudge Wilson giving him this stupendous bit of news, the fat man was singularly unimpressed.

"I had an idea we might be," Pudge called back dryly. "There's an ape down here that has been sitting on my lap ever since we took off. That force of gravity stuff is so strong that I don't think she can get off."

PROFESSOR Lucius Lavender's rocket ship had been ducking about in space for twenty-four hours. Thus far the professor wasn't quite sure what course he should take. Lavender hadn't really figured this far ahead. Neither had Pudge Wilson. Mr. Wilson, isolated in the animal ward, felt very sorry about Mrs. Wilson, a person he had forgotten about until now.

The animal ward didn't help a man's appetite. Pudge was feeling very low. He decided to chance another trip up the frail, iron ladder to the control room. Professor Lavender was just deciding on a course when Pudge's head came through the hatch for the third time since morning.

"I wish you'd leave that hatch closed." Lavender turned with nose elevated slightly. "It smells terrible down there."

Pudge controlled his temper. He had heard about people forced to live together, and finally killing each other because of raw tempers.

"You're lucky, Professor," he said. "You don't have to *live* down there with them critters. Thank the Lord you didn't get the bright idea of including skunks in this new world you're settin' up."

Lavender didn't hear. He was busy staring at an object that had flashed on the vision screen.

"That's it!" His voice was triumphant. "I'm *sure* it is."

"Skunks is terrible," Pudge continued, "but apes is bad enough."

"It *must* be," Lavender's voice was shaking. His hands clutched the controls, holding the rocket on its course. "We're directly in line with it."

"Now, you take them horses—" Pudge went on hopefully.

Lavender swivelled around in his chair.

"*You* take the horses," he shouted. "For the tenth and last time, I'm warning you not to interfere with me. Get below and stay there."

"I ain't going." Pudge balked. "I'm gonna stay right here in this ladder where I can poke my head up for fresh air."

The rocket lurched suddenly into a space-pocket and Pudge plunged from his perch, landing on his back in the cow stall.

"If I thought you did that on purpose—" he shouted wrathfully.

Then, shaking his head doubtfully, he righted himself and went back to work. A little later he thought of his wife again, and remembered that he had meant to ask the Professor about that detail. He raised his voice so it carried up through the floor, to the control room.

"Hey! Professor, why didn't we bring our wives on this expedition?"

A moment's hesitation, and Lavender's voice drifted back.

"I've never had a wife."

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Pudge nodded, content with the answer, then his cheeks reddened.

"Why, the inconsiderate bum," he sputtered. "*I* got a wife, ain't I?"

PROFESSOR Lavender had spotted Venus on the glass of the vision-screen. The planet was still thousands of miles away, and the Professor had neglected to install a speedometer in his rocket. It might be days or weeks before they reached the green planet, but at least he was aiming straight at it.

He had half-a-dozen more rockets to discharge before they were out of fuel. However, other problems had arisen.

His assistant was howling to the high heavens about the odor in the animal ward. Food was running short. The ward was much too small.

One of the apes had fallen in love with Pudge. The ape, a two hundred pound creature from Africa, insisted on making love to Pudge at every opportunity. Pudge didn't like it.

Pudge spent most of his day clinging to the uppermost rungs of the ladder, his head poked into the control room. The ape, moaning with admiration, hung below him, picking fleas and staring at Pudge with dreamy eyes.

Pudge looked as though he were sitting in a steam-bath. His head, protruding through the control room hatch, was as red as a boiled ham. The control room gradually became contaminated by Pudge's collection of wild-life.

Water, that terrible destroyer that the Professor had left earth to escape, would be appreciated now. The whole ship needed a good bath. If a garbage-scow had passed, both Pudge and the Professor would have exchanged posts with the scow-captain and appreciated the opportunity to do so.

THUS went the days on board Professor Lucius Lavender's ark. Venus drifted closer, becoming a large apple at which he aimed. The supplies were low and Pudge's morale dropped with them.

"We must suffer, escaping from the world, that we will appreciate the beauty of our new home," the Professor insisted.

"I wish the missus was along," Pudge insisted. "She can sure bake a mean pan of biscuits."

Professor Lavender became impatient.

"Perhaps I should have left you on earth, to suffer and die with the other sinners?"

"Maybe." Pudge wasn't sure. He went back to the discomforts of the animal-ward, preferring the company of a love-sick ape to further conversation with Professor Lavender.

On the seventh day, as nearly as the Professor could judge time, the rocket ship sped downward at an increased rate of speed, directly toward the planet of Venus.

He called for his worthy assistant to come top-side. Pudge's head came through the hatch and glared at him balefully.

"That darned ape is getting serious. How long before we hit ground again?"

Professor Lavender was inclined to act lofty these last days of the expedition. His accomplishment was great and the power of it had gone to his head.

"Please don't trouble me with incidentals from the live-stock department," he begged. "We will land on Venus shortly. It will be your task to see that the animals are set free and provided with proper material on which they can graze.

Pudge's head bobbed with amazement.

"You mean to tell me we're *really* gonna land on another planet?"

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Lavender expanded with importance.

"And what had you expected?"

Pudge was taken aback.

"Kinda guess I didn't expect much," he said sheepishly. "But I'd sort of like to get back home, what with this damned ape after me, and the animals all going nuts. What's Venus like?"

Lavender's eyes kindled.

"Venus," he said dreamily, "is the earth's sister-planet. My study of its surface indicates that it has the same attributes—"

"I mean, is it like home? I don't know nothing about them attribute things."

"Please," the Professor begged. "Venus will be a virgin country, much like earth but unsoiled by the footprints of man."

"What does that mean in English?" Pudge wanted to know.

"There won't be any one there but us, and the weather will be fine all the time," the Professor snapped.

"Thanks," Pudge said, and dropped below.

"SOMETIME during the night, we will land on Venus. I have the shock-cushions ready. I can only hope that we do not hit too hard."

These had been the Professor's last words before Pudge went below for the night. Pudge wasn't very much enthused about hitting anything. The end of the trip promised him some relief, and it was for this escape from the animals that Pudge lived.

He knew it must be close to the middle of that uncertain time called night. The animal ward was always dark. Putting in windows had been another one of the Professor's weak points. Pudge sat in the dark. Across from him the ape leaned sleepily against the wall, it's eyes on Pudge's nose. Every time Pudge wriggled his nose at a passing fly, the ape leaned forward eagerly, then sank back to wait again.

The poor ape couldn't understand why Pudge could look so much like her, and yet carefully avoid her advances.

WOOSH—W H A M!

Pudge felt his backbone curl up, then straighten out again. A howl went up in the darkness. The rocket hit something hard, seemed to bounce backward, and roll end for end a half-dozen times. Then the rocket was still and only the continued protests of the animals could be heard.

Pudge righted himself with great difficulty and managed to stand on both feet. He started to count his bruises, by feeling for them in the dark. There were too many sore spots. He gave up.

He started to feel his way about in the dark. His fingers touched the ape's broad nose, and he drew away in disgust. The ape sniffed loudly, lovingly, in the blackness near him.

The ship must be on its side. Pudge felt his way across the room to the ladder, followed it, clinging to its rungs whenever possible, and at last managed to open the hatch.

He leaned through it and stared at Professor Lavender. The Professor was lying on his back, staring out through a broken glass near the control-panel. Lavender rolled over as Pudge's head came into sight.

"Prepare to leave the ship and claim this place in the name of the United States," he commanded weakly.

"For a man who's come so far to get to Venus, you don't seem very glad about it, Professor."

Professor Lavender sighed.

"Have you looked out the window yet?" he asked.

Pudge grinned a little wickedly.

"Can't get into the control room," he said. "And you didn't exactly build *my* end of the ship for an observation post."

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The Professor's face reddened.

"Then let me tell you that the scenery from here looks a great deal like a New Jersey countryside. There are a couple of farmers coming down the road, and they are followed by a half-dozen cows and a dog."

Pudge's groan released all the heartache that was inside him.

"And to think I nursed them damned hay-burners all this distance!"

THE FIRST farmer paused and stared at Professor Lavender's rocket-ship as it lay on its side in the hay-field.

"It seems that another earthling has become dissatisfied and come to Venus for retreat."

The second farmed nodded.

"What a laugh we'll have when he pokes his head out and expects to find a Venus of the story-books. Harry, how in the dickens did those stories of three-armed men and six-headed women ever get started?"

Harry grinned.

"We got a good Chamber of Commerce," he said. "If the people on earth found out this was just another big subdivision, men would want to start another war right away. We got something here, mister, and we ain't gonna spoil it by letting the whole world in on the secret."

At this moment, Professor Lucius Lavender managed to unscrew the outer hatch of his rocket ship, and climb out to face the two farmers on the road.

He, in his torn, poorly fitted clothing, presented a scarecrow appearance. The two farmers stared at each other. Pudge, having a slightly easier time of it, squeezed through the hatch and stood at the Professor's side.

The Professor waved at the two farmers.

"Ho, there," he shouted. "Have we made some mistake in our calculations? Isn't this Venus?"

The two men walked toward him.

"This is Venus, all right," the first one said. "You're about a hundred miles from the capital city." He chuckled. "Funny, but we named it Washington, just like on earth."

The Professor's face turned very red. His adam's-apple worked up and down quickly.

"But—I thought . . . "

The farmer named Harry laughed heartily.

"You thought you were going to land on an uninhabited planet where there were lots of crazy looking people."

The professor gulped.

"But—Venus—inhabited?"

"And why not? We started a colony up here a hundred years ago. Nice lay-out. Just like on earth. Of course the weather—"

"Wait a minute." Pudge Wilson rounded the Professor's slight frame and faced the two farmers. "You mean to tell me you got animals up here just like on earth?"

"Certainly," Harry answered. "That bunk about lizards and eight-legged apes is enough to make anyone sick. Sometimes I think the Chamber of Commerce over-does it."

His companion nodded.

"Sure does," he agreed.

PUDGE wasn't listening. He stared at Professor Lavender with half closed eyes. The Professor backed away a few feet.

"Apes," Pudge said in a low voice. "Horses, cows, rabbits that grow into dozens. No hay—no straw . . . "

"Be calm, Wilson," the Professor urged.

The farmer, Harry's friend, was still talking.

"Course, there's no women here." His

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eyes gleamed suddenly. "That is, of course, unless you fellows brought some along?"

The Professor looked doubtful, and Pudge pivoted suddenly to face the reception committee.

"Not-even-my-wife," he said in a doleful voice. "He was so interested in growing a new race of animals that he didn't even think about women."

Harry looked sad, then smiled again as though trying to forget how nice a wife might fit into the landscape.

"Oh, well, we handle the population angle by laboratory control at the capital," he said. "It works out pretty good."

"You've got all the animals you need?" the Professor asked hopefully.

"And more," Harry said. "Wouldn't give a dime a dozen for all the livestock on earth. We've developed a finer breed. If you got animals on that ship, you'd better not let them off. The livestock department at the capital will insist on examining them before they are slaughtered."

Professor Lucius Lavender stared at Pudge, and Pudge's eyes grew openly hostile.

"Well," the Professor said hopefully, "at least we've escaped a horrible death on earth."

For the first time since their arrival, the two farmers seemed greatly interested.

"Death—or earth? You can't mean that?" Harry cried.

Professor Lavender's eyes brightened and he looked for the first time as though he was really enjoying himself.

"Oh, yes," he cried. "Of course, there was no way for you, or the others, to know. I had the flood figured out mathematically. The great rain started the day we left. By now the world must be half flooded. It will be a matter of days before life on earth is destroyed."

THE TWO farmers stared at each other, and both of them started to laugh. Pudge Wilson tightened his fists and refused to remove his eyes from Professor Lavender's peaked face.

"Go on, you two," Pudge invited grimly. "What's funny now? I'll bet it'll kill the Professor. If it don't, maybe I will."

Harry was laughing the harder.

"We get a daily report from our observatory," he said. "Our telescopes are so powerful that they see all the news that is fit to print about earth. I've been reading the papers for years, and there has been no recent mention of a flood."

"No," his companion added. "And here's the funniest thing about floods. We get one hour of sunshine in the morning. After that, it rains for twenty-three hours every day here on Venus."

Professor Lucius Lavender made a desperate but unsuccessful attempt to escape Pudge Wilson's fist. He went down on one knee.

"That first sock is for taking me away from home," Pudge howled, and let loose again. This time he connected solidly, and Professor Lavender stretched out at full length, staring up pleasantly at non-existent stars.

"And this is for locking me up with that damned ape."

Professor Lavender couldn't move. He felt pleasantly paralyzed. Little stars zipped around inside his skull and he heard angels singing.

It started to rain, and the water poured down on his upturned face in an avalanche.

Pudge leaned over him, and with great pleasure in his voice, whispered:

"So you wanted to escape the flood, did you? Remember, Professor, *I* can have that *ape* shot. You *can't* escape the rain. *Twenty-three hours every day, Professor, remember!*"

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☆ HARNESSING LIGHTNING ☆

IN THE days of the not-too-distant past it was necessary for public utility companies to stop their machinery when a thunderstorm loomed. All the lights in the city would go out. Street-cars would remain standing in the middle of a block. Every home kept an emergency shelf filled with candles and matches and perhaps an oil lamp so that when a storm brewed the inhabitants would be able to find their way around.

And yet when we look about us today, we observe that thunder and lightning crashes outdoors while normal activities continue almost unmindful of the disturbance. What has brought this about?

For the past twenty-five years through patient and detailed study by the research engineers of the great electrical manufacturing countries, safety measures have been devised and put into use. Automatic circuit breakers, oil switches, and insulators are protecting power lines and equipment. In order to study the problem elaborately equipped experimental stations have been constructed. There the greatest miracle man has ever witnessed, nature's most powerful and spectaular stroke, is created and recreated for the purpose of scientific study.

Yes, man has been able to make lightning. Strokes of ten million volts are generated, measured, and studied. Until the necessary machines were constructed it was impossible to make any progress toward discovering more about lightning. A scientist could wait for weeks in the open with all his measuring apparatus. When an electrical storm would occur, lightning might strike a mile away and he'd be out of luck. There was only one way to study lightning—by making it.

Research engineers followed Mother Nature's own pattern for the making of lightning. They reproduced with utmost accuracy in machinery the same conditions which cause an electric storm. In nature, the clouds above and the earth below, when charged with electricity of opposite sign, produce lightning. Electrons pile up until the cloud will no longer hold more. When another electron tries to become attached to a loaded cloud, the fireworks begin. Electrons are thrown from one cloud to another and back to earth in long startling flashes. The increase in pressure (voltage) is followed by huge explosions which can be heard over and over again as the electrons accumulate.

Man-made lightning is not permeated with the drama, the grandeur, the magnificence of nature's work. The lashing winds, restless leaves, and darkened skies are ignored by men of science in their quest for the mechanical influences involved. These are only the outer aspects of the storm. In a brick building which is part of the General Electric Company's factory at Pittsfield, Massachusetts, lightning strikes time and time again. Controlled for careful study, scientists are able to produce it at will. The room which has been specially constructed to withstand the onslaught of huge electrical charges is an enormous cube measuring more than a hundred feet square by seventy feet high. Nothing resembling nature's mechanism can be seen there. Instead of clouds, two huge wooden frames studded with shining brown insulators tower to a height of fifty feet. These hold back millions of volts until they are wanted. Inconspicuous because they are so tiny are the little black boxes known as "capacitors." They're placed among the insulators. Within them the electrons are stored just as they are in clouds.

The laboratory itself has a constant artificial climate. Lightning requires higher voltage, that is, more pressure, to leap through dry than through wet air. This fact has been recognized by electricians and provided for. Also recognized and provided for is the need of safety devises to guard the lives of the men who work there. Dealing with lightning is dealing with death. Everywhere science has conceived and put into use automatic protective devices.

In order to put the lightning appartus in motion it is necessary for an electrician to ascend to the top of one of the frames to make a few connections among the "clouds." This is done by means of a crane which lifts him up and deposits him back where he started from. The men present climb to a special observation platform which is situated halfway between the floor and the ceiling. When the order is given the lights are dimmed and the scene is set for lightning's grand entrance.

For thirty seconds nothing occurs that is visible, but the machines are busy at work. It requires that amount of time to load the capacitors. A warning shout is heard and then—a blinding flash! a sharp, ear-splitting report!

Ten million volts went into that mighty effort. The sparks jumped all of thirty feet. The energy in that flash was equal to that at the muzzle of six sixteen-inch naval guns. Lightning has been reduced to an engineering basis; the momentary, blinding glare and the gun-like crack are all the untrained observer can note in this huge exchange of energy. The scientist is able to measure here the voltage, and the amperage as accurately as time is measured by the clock. The type of stroke can be varied with a resetting of the apparatus. At will horizontal and then vertical strokes are produced, and with them the scientist tests effects on miniature buildings and actual-sized telephone poles.

Out of such studies methods of reducing lightning hazards have come. The automatic oil-circuit breakers and complicated insulators could not have been invented if engineers had given up the struggle to harness lightning. It is no longer necessary to keep the old oil lamp handy in case a storm brews.—*R. Clayton.*

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SIREN SONG

By LESTER BARCLAY

Ages ago the sirens sang a fateful song of allure to passing mariners from the rocks of the Sicilian narrows—then came a great war, and an underground to combat it

"I DON'T understand! All the guy does is sing!"

Don Kenton looked at the speaker and smiled ironically.

"Yes, Mr. Conway," his voice was soft, syrupy, persuasive: the voice of a press agent, "that's all. So the Gilmore Theatre has to have special police called out to handle the crowds. Sure, just a voice; but look out there!"

They were standing in a wing, off stage, of the Gilmore Theatre, Chicago's finest. A slender, black-haired young man in a sport suit stood before a microphone on the center of the stage. The great spotlight glow, which bathed him from head to toe, emphasized the paleness of his face, gave to it a shy, boyish look which belied his years.

He was singing a ballad, a popular song of the day. He had a low voice, with a trick of inflection that gave to each listener the impression that he was singing to her alone. He had stopped singing for a bare second. A low gurgle of laughter came over the mike; then he continued with his song.

It was at this point, Kenton had said, "Look out there."

A great squeal had come up from the audience. Conway looked out at the audience. His eyes met row on row of slack-clad, short-skirt clad, school girls. The whole theatre seemed filled with them. He could see them sitting there, eyes and ears intent on the slender figure before the mike. There was ecstacy, idolatry in their faces. And now they squealed again, as though his voice had struck a responsive chord in their hearts. This time he went on to finish the song. Then, bowing in a jerky, embarrassed sort of way, he walked off stage, to Conway and Kenton. Walked off to the sound of a storm of shrieks and clapping hands.

He stood beside the two men in the wing and listened to the applause roll in ever mounting volume through the theatre. He put out his hand, palm up, and said:

"Got 'em right there, Donnie boy," and walked back on-stage. There was something offensive, something cheaply theatrical in the gesture.

Conway turned abruptly and walked away. Kenton, as though anticipating the move, wheeled with him. They paused momentarily at the stair which led down to the dressing rooms and up to the offices of the theatre.

"Yep," said Kenton, continuing from where he had left off, "two million school girls drool over their radios every Thursday night: the Crosley poll says so, just because Andre is singing."

"Look, Kenton," Conway said, "I'm not going to pay more than ten thousand, not even if the Crosley poll shows the whole damned world is listening to him." There was finality in his voice. He started to walk up the stairs but stopped on hearing Kenton say:

"Look, Conway, that isn't good business. You're letting your personal dislike of Andre run away with your sense of business. You've done a record gross in the week the kid's been here. We

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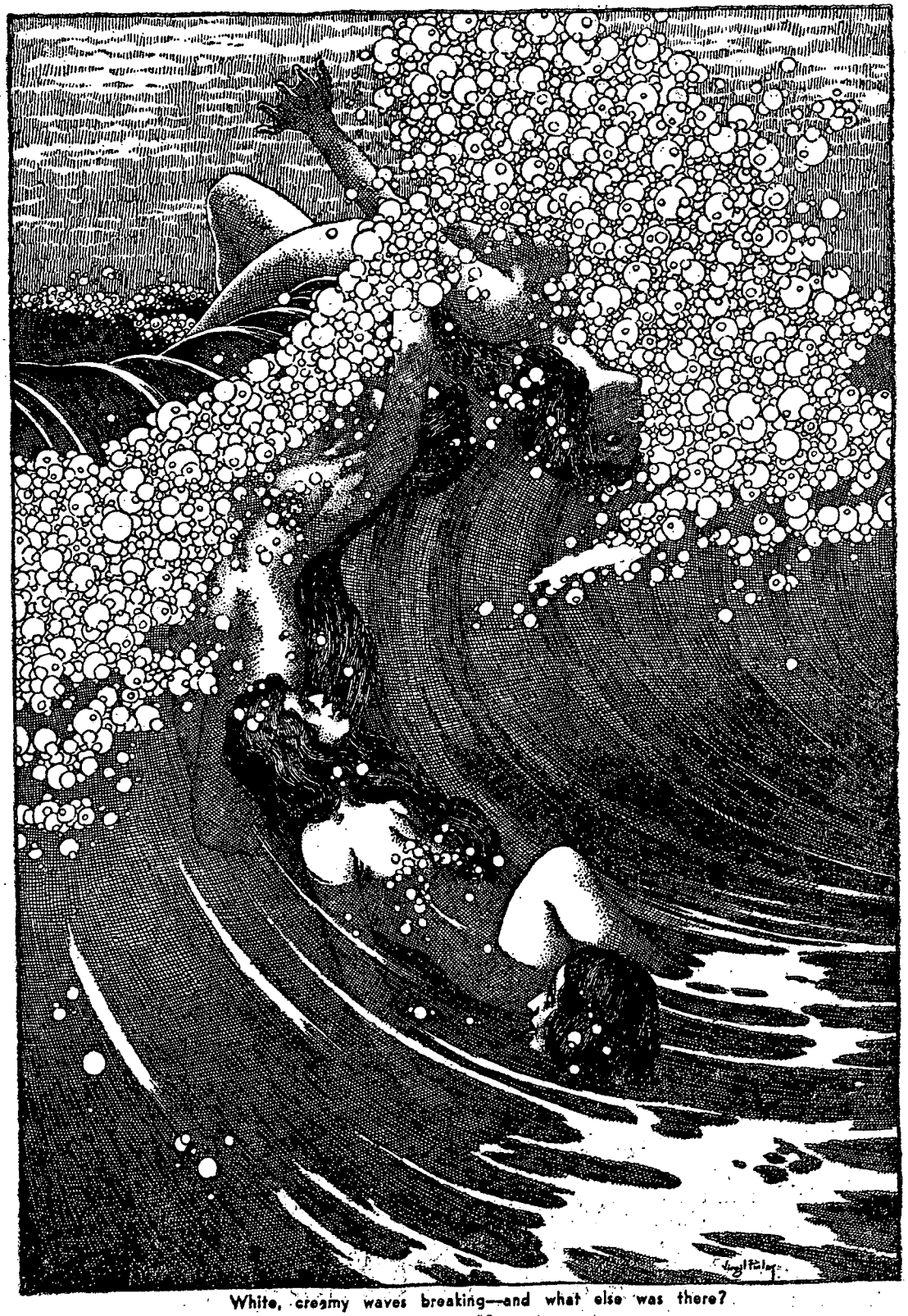

White, creamy waves breaking—and what else was there?

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don't have another booking until the thirtieth, two weeks from tomorrow. That was my doing. Chicago gave Andre his first break and I want him to sing here until the time comes for his—"

"Yes?" Conway asked curiously.

"—leaving for the war fronts to entertain the troops."

The tuxedo clad figure of the general manager stiffened. He walked back to Kenton.

"Andre is going over to entertain—in battle areas?"

"That's right," said Kenton, pulling out a telegram from his jacket pocket. "Here's the acceptance from the War Department. We leave the first of December."

The shrewd eyes of Conway gleamed in anticipation. He could see the publicity buildup on it. The Gilmore Theatre was going to have the biggest two weeks of business of its entire history.

"How much do you want?"

"Fifteen thousand a week."

There was not even a second's hesitation in Conway's answer to Kenton's demand:

"Come up and sign the contract!"

DON KENTON picked up the sharp-pointed letter opener and flicked it down at the table top. It stuck there, quivering along its length. He pulled it out and threw it again.

He had been doing that for fifteen minutes; ever since he had walked into Peter Andre's dressing room. Andre's valet was busily laying out the singer's dress clothes. The only sounds in the room were those of the clock on the dressing table and of the letter opener striking wood. It was exactly eleven. In just a few minutes Andre would be down from the stage above.

But Kenton wasn't aware of the time. Nor did he seem to notice the valet in his movements, not even when the man picked up something from the dressing table. He was lost in the memory of what had happened on a certain day, sixteen months before. . . .

. . . Don Kenton walked down Halsted Street. His eyes glanced, with seemingly casual interest, at store fronts. One hand, deep in trouser pocket, played with two coins there, a quarter and a dime. It was all the money he had.

He stopped before a restaurant window almost obliterated by small paper signs announcing the number of dishes to be had. The blocky figure teetered back and forth on run-down heels for several seconds, then opened the screen door and walked in. A heavy odor, compounded of garlic, spice, sweat and food, made his nostrils twitch and his stomach contract in remembrance.

Don Kenton hadn't eaten in two days. The thirty-five cents in his pocket was all the money he had. He had passed up a dozen restaurants in his walk. Food was necessary but when one had only thirty-five cents, the cost was counted. A small sign had read, "Stew- fifteen cents." It was ten cents cheaper than in any of the other places. So Kenton had picked the Athenia Restaurant.

He was the only customer at the counter. But there were a dozen men seated at several tables at the rear of the restaurant. They were all talking or rather shouting at each other. Now and then one would pick up a paper lying on the table and read aloud in an excited voice. Whatever it was that excited them so was beyond Kenton's comprehension. It was all Greek to him, literally.

The lone waiter, noticing Kenton for the first time, came walking slowly over, behind the counter. He was singing to himself in a low voice. It was a

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haunting melody, but the words were meaningless to Kenton. The waiter was singing in Greek.

"What'll it be, sir?" he asked.

Kenton studied the pale face above him. Wavy black hair made darker the soft oval shaped brown eyes. The skin was pale and clear. It was an appealing face.

"Nice voice you got there, bud," Kenton said.

"Thanks," the waiter smiled his appreciation. His teeth were white and even. "Now, what will you have?"

"Make it the stew. And coffee."

The waiter studied the face before him. Reddish hair, blue eyes, square cut features, a nose, broken at the bridge; thin, firm lips, strong chin. He noticed, too, the tired lines, the shoulders making an effort to be square and straight but sagging in weariness.

"Yes, sir," he repeated. "Stew and coffee."

KENTON looked at the huge plate of stew and small mountain of bread slices in amazement. There was enough food there to feed three people.

"That's all there was," the waiter explained. "And you looked—" He paused and Kenton understood.

"Thanks, fella," he said gruffly, and began to eat.

The screen door closed with a bang, just as he swallowed the last mouthful and two men charged in. One of them was waving a newspaper in his hand and shouting at the same time.

The effect of the words on the group was electrifying. Horror, disbelief and sorrow were written on the faces of the men at the tables. One even buried his face in his hands and broke into an uncontrolled flood of tears.

Kenton looked on in wonder. He couldn't imagine what was in the paper to have created such an emotional storm. He noticed, too, that the young waiter was as much affected by the news as were the rest. There was a look of utter horror on his face.

A great barrel of a man stood up from among those at the furthest table. He said something in a deep, low voice. Quiet followed his words. He took the newspaper from the man and began to read aloud. His voice rolled the phrases out in a measured manner and the dingy restaurant became alive with the unspoken feelings of these men. For in the reader's words could be felt a great sorrow and a pronouncement of doom. He finished reading and a strange thing happened.

The waiter had been standing by one of the tables. At one point in the reading, he had gasped aloud and Kenton saw his shoulders sag. When the man finished reading, he said something in a low voice to the waiter. He heard the waiter say, "No, no! It can't be!" and saw the other nod his head. While the two talked, the rest of the men had turned their backs to the waiter. Finally the big man held out his arm in an unmistakable gesture. He was telling the waiter to leave the restaurant!

Slowly, the young man undid the strings of his apron. It fell to the floor. The waiter turned without a word and walked out of the place. Nor did anyone turn to see him go.

Kenton laid the quarter down on the counter. He didn't wait for his nickel change. He only wanted to get to the young man. When he got to the street, he saw him slowly walking along, his head bent low and feet almost dragging.

"Mind if I walk with you?" he asked, stepping along beside the other.

Brown eyes, painfilled and wretched, looked into his for a second and turned away.

"So you got fired! Hell, y' oughta be thankful. After all, you don't have to

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work in joints like that."

"Get the hell away from me!" the other said savagely.

Kenton stopped, grasped the other's arm and pulled him to a stop.

"Look," he said compellingly, "I don't know what happened there. And I don't want to know. I don't know what you're going to do but if you'll listen to me for a minute, I got an idea."

For a second, the young man's eyes blazed in anger, then the hopeless expression returned. And something else. A "to hell with it," look.

"What's your idea?" he asked.

Kenton told him. That he had a voice which, under the proper guidance, could make his fortune.

"Lead me to it," was his answer to Kenton's build-up.

KENTON had been a fighter, manager, newspaper reporter. But he saw the possibilities in the young waiter's voice. And he knew enough theatrical booking agents to make the chance of getting an audition a reasonable certainty. That was all he wanted. He knew the boy's voice would do the rest.

The way up the ladder of success was slow at first. Then the rungs had gotten closer until now they were at the very top. For in Kenton's pocket lay another telegram, telling him that Andre's screen test had been a complete success and that Hollywood wanted him at a truly colossal salary.

But Kenton's thoughts at that moment were not of Hollywood or money. He was back again in that Greek restaurant. Peter Andre had never told what had been said to him, or why it was said. Andre had been a voracious reader of the war news. Then one day he had read something which had made him tear the paper in anger. It was more than anger, Kenton realized, for he had not just torn the paper in two. He had not been satisfied until there was nothing left of it but a pile of tiny scraps. Then he had stalked out of their hotel room. When he returned, late the next afternoon, he was blind drunk.

Kenton had gone over another edition of that paper, from page to page but had found nothing that could give him a solution of the mystery. But from that night to this, Andre had never read another newspaper. And the bitterness which had bloomed on that day, sixteen months before, had grown into a fearsome and chilling plant. . . .

. . . The door opened and Andre walked in.

"Well, Don, what happened?" he asked, as he sat down and began to remove the make-up from his face.

Kenton leaned against the door jamb. He studied Andre's profile for a few seconds, before answering. Then he said:

"It's in the bag, Pete. We get two more weeks—at our figure."

"Good. Now maybe Hollywood'll take notice."

Kenton started to pull the telegram from Hollywood out of his pocket. Something made him stay his fingers.

"Better get dressed, Pete," he said, instead. "Mike Risel asked us to stop in at the Chez Lyons after the show."

THEIR table, to one side, yet not too far from the floor, was waiting for them.

Kenton ordered a double-scotch from the waiter. Andre was satisfied with a Martini. They had been sitting there for a few minutes, when a voice broke in on their silence.

"Well, well, if it isn't "The Moan!'"

Kenton looked up at the unexpected sound, and almost groaned aloud. He was looking at the broadly smiling features of Richard Todd, whose widely

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read column was a feature in Chicago's largest newspaper. That, however, wasn't what had brought the groan to his throat.

Peter Andre was Todd's pet peeve. The man had an aversion for all crooners and for Andre in particular. When another columnist had labeled him "The Voice," Todd began to call him "The Moan." He had never failed to belittle him in some way or other. In that morning's column, Todd had gone the limit. Kenton remembered how the column had read:

"So, 'The Moan' closes at the Gilmore tonight. How sad will be the hearts of Chicago's bobby-socked junior set. Their hero is leaving. Let them not grieve too much. Your reporter has it on good authority that The Moan is going to greener, fatter pastures. The Moguls of Hollywood have seen the light. The Moan will not only be heard —he will be seen. And several million morons will have their chance to show their adulation in public.

"This reporter has but one question to ask of The Moan. Why has he never offered to go abroad to entertain our troops? Is he afraid his doting public will forget his adenoidal groanings? Or is he just afraid?"

Kenton's fist clenched under the table. He was glad for once that Andre didn't read newspapers.

Todd sat down. Andre didn't bother turning from the floor show, which had just come on.

"Aren't you afraid these people are a little too grown-up for you, Andre?" Todd asked sneeringly.

Andre didn't answer.

"What'sa matter? Is little goody-two-shoes mad at the big bad columnist?"

"Shut up, Todd!" Kenton interposed savagely. He saw now that Todd was drunk.

Todd's slightly wavering, bloodshot eyes turned in Kenton's direction. His voice was harsh with anger when he answered:

"Listen, character. Nobody's talking to you. I'm talking to curly-locks here, so keep your lip shut."

Kenton tried another tact.

"Aw now, Todd. What the hell's wrong with you? Why'd you keep riding him. Like you did today."

"Oh, so you wanna know, huh?" Well, I'll tell ya. Because I think he's yella. That's why. He's *afraid* to go across seas. That's why—"

"You're a liar!" said Andre suddenly.

The smile returned to Todd's lips.

"Thanks, pal," he said and delivered a stinging slap to Andre's face.

Andre's face, usually pale, had become white. The marks of Todd's fingers were red welts on the white skin. A terrible anger blazed for a second in the singer's eyes. Then the blaze was succeeded by the ashes of his hidden bitterness.

Todd sneered:

"Just as I said: you're yella. I wanted to prove it. Well, it's too bad you don't read papers, because what I am going to say about you—"

"Todd!" It was Kenton who called his name. Kenton had never felt an anger as great as he was experiencing now. It was directed not alone at Todd but at Andre as well. He could understand verbal blows; they stung, but one could forget them. But this was different. Todd had committed a physical violence, and Andre had let it pass. He could see the singer wasn't going to do anything about it. And he could see Todd was building up to more than a slap.

Todd turned to him and snarled:

"Keep out of this, you! I'm going to slap this jerk around a little."

Then dynamite exploded on Todd's chin. It was Kenton's fist. Todd went

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crashing backward on to the floor. Immediately a half dozen waiters converged on their table. People stood up to see what the brawl was all about. Mike Risel, himself, came running over.

The waiters helped Todd to his feet. Kenton stood above him. As Todd came erect, Kenton handed him a telegram, saying:

"Here, stupid. Read this! Maybe this'll change your mind about Andre." Then he turned to Andre and said:

"Come on, Pete, let's get outa here. I've got something to tell you."

"ALLRIGHT, Don, spill it. What was in that telegram?" Andre asked, as they were riding back to their hotel.

"It was an okay from the War Department on your tour of the war fronts," Kenton replied. He didn't look at the other, when he told him what it was.

"A tour of the war—say, *what* the hell are you talking about? We aren't going overseas. We're going to Hollywood."

"After you get back, we are," replied Kenton.

"You're nuts! I'm not going any place but Hollywood."

"Sorry, Pete. But Conway's already got the ads set up on your trip. And I've wired Hollywood that we're leaving. Reservations have been made for us. We can't do anything else."

"No?" stormed the other. "Maybe you can't. But I can and am. I'm *not* going!"

"S'matter, Pete, yellow? Afraid of your skin? Or your reputation?"

Peter Andre looked at Kenton for a long, silent moment. Then he said, stonily:

"Neither! But remember this, Don. When we come back, I'm getting a new manager."

Kenton didn't answer.

The next two weeks were the most miserable Kenton had even known. Andre received thunderous ovations at every performance. Conway had done an excellent job of publicity. Hollywood had taken Andre's departure in fine style. Several film magazines had forecast a happy film career for the singer on his return. All this should have made Kenton's lot a happy one. But it didn't make up for Andre's attitude.

The singer had observed only the barest of amenities since the night they had quarreled. Kenton was glad when their engagement ended. Perhaps Andre would change, once they embarked.

It proved to be a joyless and silent trip, insofar as Andre and Kenton were concerned. Andre retreated completely into the shell of bitterness in which he seemed to dwell. Although the other occupants of the plane, a half dozen Army officers, tried to draw him out, he vouchsafed only a "Yes or "No" to their questions.

The army had one of its Public Relations officers, a Captain Wilton, meet them at the airport. Kenton noticed the look of curiosity he gave to Andre as they stepped out of the plane.

"Hm," the Captain said as they walked to the official car which had been assigned for their use, "I must say you're a bit different from what I expected."

Andre continued to walk silently along, but Kenton asked:

"Why? What *did* you expect?"

Captain Wilton colored slightly, as if embarrassed by the question.

"We-ll, perhaps we've been misled. Ahem," he cleared his throat and continued: "You see, Kenton, the newspapers we receive over here don't treat Andre too kindly. I see now that I have been—oh hell," he swore, and laughed.

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"That's what I get for believing what the papers say. Andre looks like a right guy."

"You damned right he is, Captain," Kenton said quietly. "And that's what the boys will think when they've seen and heard him."

That night they went over their itinerary with Captain Wilton. Andre was scheduled to appear at ten bomber stations and a like number of fighter stations.

IT WAS a chill, fog-filled dawn which found them on their way to Andre's first show. It proved to be before a bombing group. A leather-jacketed Colonel took them in charge on their arrival. He was rather young for so high a rank. But he had seen two years of active combat service and in his taut features, lined cheeks and somber eyes were the marks of his experiences.

"Look, Andre," he said, as they walked into his office, "the boys are going right out right after they hear you sing. They're keyed up pretty tight. Don't expect too much in the way of applause; their minds are on other things. Of course, if you were a pin-up girl—" He left the words hanging in the air and the laugh which followed released the tension which both Kenton and Andre felt.

The stage on which Andre was to sing wasn't the complete and pretentious affair of the Gilmore Theatre. There was no orchestra pit. A piano stood on the stage. A staff-sergeant was sitting before, it his nimble fingers were pounding out a boogie-woogie rhythm. Four or five hundred men, the entire personnel of the station sat or stood on the ground before the stage.

Andre, carrying some sheet music for the accompanist, walked up the short flight of stairs leading on to the stage. He handed the music to the sergeant and walked to the mike at the center of the stage. Beside it stood another sergeant, the master of ceremonies. That sergeant held up his hands as a signal for silence.

"Men," his voice came over the mike in an announcement, "this station has been given the signal honor today, of having for its guest—The Voice, Peter Andre."

A murmur ran through the audience. Here and there a laugh was heard. Kenton, standing beside Captain Wilton and the Colonel, felt the palms of his hands become sweaty. He didn't like the sound of those laughs. Nor did he like the grins which had come on scores of faces. It was what he had dreaded. Peter Andre was in for a terrific ribbing. The sergeant before the mike felt the mood of the men also. He continued quickly, "All right, gang. He's not the pin-up girl we'd like to see, but let's show our appreciation."

The applause which followed was heartfelt and sincere. Andre smiled embarrassedly and took over the mike.

"Thank you, men," Andre said. There was a somber quality to his voice. "I have been told by your commanding officer that there will be some of you leaving on a bombing mission immediately following my performance. Therefore, with your permission, I'd like to sing first a song of my native country, Greece. It is a song which has inspired many a man to reach the heights of heroism."

ANDRE began to sing and Kenton felt his jaw go slack. Andre's voice was a natural baritone. Singing before the mike, he had never found it necessary to use the power of his voice. But here in the open, he sang with all the richness and beauty at his disposal. Never had Kenton heard him sing so.

A hush fell over the crowd. At first

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he sang without accompaniment but after the first chorus, the soldier at the piano improvised an accompaniment.

Kenton didn't understand the words but there was that in the voice which told as much as words could. Men fought, were conquered, and fought on; fought on until they conquered. A tremendous burst of applause greeted the end of the song. Kenton looked around him in amazement. Every face was transfigured with a look of stern determination. It was as though the song had touched some hidden depth in their souls. Beside him a voice whispered, "Magnificent! I could see it, as he sang."

It was the Colonel who had spoken.

"See what?" Kenton asked curiously.

"See those Greeks under Leonidas at Thermopylae. I could see the plain of Marathon," was the strange reply.

The men were still clapping and whistling. Kenton could see that Andre had them under a spell. Andre sang until he was hoarse. He would have kept singing but the Colonel had to stop him. His men had a mission to perform.

Walking back to the car, Captain Wilton congratulated Andre.

"That was wonderful! I mean your first song. Didn't understand a word of it. Didn't have to. I could see it all! Our boys charging again and again into that murderous cross-fire at Argonne. And d'you know? I was right there with 'em. Cheering 'em on! Wonderful!"

"Yep, Pete," Kenton said quietly, "you did a first rate job."

Oddly enough, it was to Kenton that Andre offered his thanks. Kenton's heart lifted in gladness. The days of silence were at an end. Kenton had been forgiven.

Later that night when they were alone in their room, Kenton asked:

"What's wrong, Pete? What's the mystery?"

Andre finished lighting the pipe which Kenton's question had interrupted. He puffed in a contemplative silence for several minutes before replying. And his reply answered nothing. For all he said was:

"Nothing, Don."

Kenton become angry suddenly.

"Aw, don't give me that, Peter. Something's been eating at you for a long time. Ever since I met you, in fact. It's none of my damned business but, hell, Pete, it isn't as though we were strangers. You've been the best friend I've ever had and I think you know how I feel about you."

IT WAS a long speech for Kenton. But he'd been holding still for a long time. And something Andre had said that morning broke the dam of his curiosity. Andre had said, "My native country, Greece." Kenton knew so little about Andre, even after a year and a half of association that he didn't know the singer had been born in Greece.

"Hm. I guess I've been a pretty secretive sort of a guy, haven't I, Don?" Andre said quietly. "And I admit you've never been curious, at least outwardly. I want you to know I feel the same way about you. You've been the best friend I've ever had. And you've proven it, time and time again."

He smiled at Kenton's slightly dumbfounded look, and continued:

"But something happened this morning that was very strange. First, let me tell you what happened this morning. Then I'll tell about myself.

"I stood on the stage and looked down at all the faces before me. They were all smiling, grinning, laughing. I noticed how young they all seemed to be: these Air Corps men. Some, I knew, were pilots, others bombardiers and gunners and navigators. And the

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rest were the ground crews. And I knew that soon many of these men were going to go out and brave death.

"You know, Don, death is something one shouldn't face with a laugh or a smile. Death is an end to living. And it can be a horrible, torturing end, filled with fear and pain. But these men didn't seem to know that.

"Suddenly, I knew I had to tell them how to face death. With courage and steadfast heart and an unconquerable soul. Who told me to sing that song, how I came to know the truth—"

He shrugged his shoulders in answer and looked at Kenton quizzically.

Andre's manager was staring at him as though he was seeing him for the first time.

Andre interpreted the look correctly.

"Sounds crazy, doesn't it? But I swear I wasn't going to sing that song when I got up there. And now for the mystery of Peter Andre Myloris."

The name had a familiar ring to Kenton although it was the first time he'd heard it. Andre had never told his real name before.

"Do you remember," Pete continued, "what happened that first time you saw me in that restaurant on Halsted Street?"

Kenton nodded.

"I suppose you wondered what all the excitement was about? Well, Don, those men who rushed in with the paper bore terrible news for all of us. Greek resistance had come to an end, that day! The Germans had conquered another little country."

He sighed heavily and Kenton saw that the bitter look had returned to his eyes.

"Yes, Don, it was bitter news for all of us. But doubly bitter for me. For in that paper were the names of those traitors who were to serve in the provisional government set up by the Germans. Don, my father's name headed the list! My father, who had taught me love of country, who had always kept bright the heritage of our family name, who had sent me to America, so that I could learn the customs of a democracy and so return to Greece with a gift for her—my father was the arch-traitor!"

"Take it easy, Pete," said Kenton warningly. Andre's voice had risen with the telling of his tale until at the end he was almost shouting.

"Don't take it like that, fella. After all, it might be a mistake."

"No, Don, it's true all right. That's what I kept hoping—that it was all a mistake. Then one night I read where they'd awarded my father some sort of honor for being of such service to the enemy. You remember, Don, how I tore the paper into shreds and refused to read any newspapers from that day on."

Kenton realized then there was nothing he could say or do. It was a battle which the singer had to fight alone.

THE next day they were taken to a fighter station and again Andre sang the Greek song, with the same results. The men loved it. In the three weeks that followed the sing became the most popular on Andre's repertoire. In fact when the tour was over, the head of the Public Relations Department asked if they'd like to go to the Italian front to entertain.

They agreed and in a few days were on their way to Cairo. There they transferred to a bomber, bound for Foggia. It was a new bomber that held only a skeleton crew of three men, besides Kenton and Andre. There was a pilot, navigator and radio man. They took off just before dusk. Foggia was but a four-hour hop from the airport.

The weather had been clear when they took off and the radio man reported clear weather all the way to their

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destination. And it was clear weather until they started to cross the boot. There, they ran into cloud formations sky high. And worse. It was winter, yet in the clouds they ran into the midst of the most terrific electrical storm they'd ever seen.

The navigator came into their compartment. He looked worried.

"Hell," he said, sitting on a crate, "half my instruments are jammed. We'll have to fly by dead reckoning and if there's no ceiling at Foggia—"

"Yes?" said Andre.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Then we'll have to find a nice soft spot to land on."

TWICE the pilot brought the big craft down to where he thought he could break through the clouds but both times he had to regain altitude when his altimeter showed he was too low.

The storm increased in violence. The big ship was tossed around in the fury of the wind as though it were a toothpick. Both the radio man and the navigator were with the pilot, talking over the situation.

Kenton looked at his wrist watch. Nine hours had passed since they had left Cairo.

"Looks kind of tough, Pete," he said grimly.

Andre smiled.

"Never say die," he answered. "But better see if your chute's okay."

As though Andre had anticipated what was to happen, the plane was seized in the grip of a mad wind. It whirled the ship around, as though it was a ball. They sank and rose thousands of feet in a few seconds. Suddenly, there was the rending sound of metal giving way.

"Better get ready to take off, men!"

They turned at the sound of the voice. It was the radio man. He had stuck his head out of the pilot's compartment. There was that in his face which told more than words.

"Guess this is it, Pete," Kenton remarked, his voice nonchalant. But his pale face and tightly held lips told another story.

Andre wasn't listening. His ears had been intent on the sound of the motors. Now they caught that sluttering sound again. He had heard that sound a few minutes before but after a few seconds the motors had resumed their powerful hum. Not this time.

The cracking sound was repeated as another vicious gust of wind tore at them. Suddenly the navigator came to the door, his voice calm, matter-of-fact when he said:

"Down the hatch, fellas. We're coming apart."

Don leaped first, Andre right behind. Kenton felt the chute open with a shoulder straining jerk and he was floating free in the soft wetness of the clouds. Oddly enough, the storm ended as abruptly as it had begun.

Now he was through the clouds. Darkness was all about him. He saw a patch of white, about ten yards to his right. It was Andre!

"Hey, Pete!" he shouted.

Andre's voice came back reassuringly:

"Don! Are you all right?"

"Fine! Swell! So far. But where the hell are we?"

"Don't know. But we'll soon find out. Watch it now, Don, and don't forget: relax."

He looked down and saw the reason for Andre's concern. Trees, the rock-strewn, barren, creased look of the land below did not look inviting. It seemed to be coming up to meet him at express train speed. Then his feet touched ground. But not for long. He fell back-

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ward and the chute began pulling him across the rough ground. Somehow he managed to twist around and pull at some of the ropes. Finally he spilled enough air from the parachute to make it collapse. Painfully and wearily he got out of the harness. Andre came running up.

"Are you all right, Don?"

Kenton groaned. "Sure," even as he felt himself over to see if he was all right. Except for several sore spots and a general stiffness, both men were unharmed by the fall.

"Looks like we've landed on some mountain side," Andre said. "Might as well make ourselves comfortable till we can see where we are."

Kenton looked at the luminous face of his watch.

"Four o'clock! Should be light in about an hour, I guess," he announced.

DAWN found them half frozen, with aching muscles and joints. They looked about them and their spirits sank. It was the wildest kind of country.

They had landed, fortunately, on a plateau. But all about them were the jagged crags of mountain tops. Here and there stunted tree growths made futile attempts at existence.

Andre grabbed Kenton's arm.

"Look!" he exclaimed, pointing up the slope of the plateau.

Kenton looked and saw gray-blue smoke slowly ascending into the thin mountain air.

As quickly as their tired and aching muscles permitted, they scrambled to the highest point and looked down into the shallow valley several hundred feet below. A village nestled there. They could see movement in the narrow streets. Here and there livestock wandered. As they looked they saw a woman come out of a house and empty a bucket into the street.

They sighed in unison. Their first sight of the country had not given them any hope for the future. The village below meant a means of getting back to civilization. They had noticed several trucks parked in the village square.

Their aches were forgotten in their eagerness to get down there. They were almost to a small group of houses, set at the edge of the village, when Andre pulled Don to a halt. He pulled him down to the shelter of some bushes.

"Hey, Pete," Don said angrily, "what the hell's the idea?"

"Sh! Look—down there!"

Don looked and understood.

The trucks in the square were army trucks—German army trucks. They could see the drivers behind the wheels. And now they saw half a dozen officers come out from the large stone building in front of which the trucks were parked. Thay stood in a group talking for a few seconds, then saluting each other, they separated, three going one way and three another.

Don rolled over and lay on his back, staring stonily at the blue above. Andre continued to look into the village.

"From the frying pan into the fire, eh, Pete," Kenton said. "That plane sure went places, if there are German troups here."

"So what do we do, General? Retreat or surrender?"

Kenton looked back to where they had come from. He remembered the looks of the country beyond. He hesitated for a second and Andre understood. The village might hold sanctuary.

"Nope," he said at last in a regretful tone. "We can't take a chance, Pete. It's over the mountain for us."

But the decision was suddenly taken out of their hands. A scream, high and

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thin in pain and fear, came to them. It came from the cluster of stone houses a couple of hundred yards from where they had taken cover. Kenton scrambled to his feet and found he was alone. Peter Andre was sprinting toward the sound.

They were fifty feet from the nearest house when the scream came again. The sound, that of a woman's voice, lent wings to their feet. Andre leaped through the open door, Kenton a second behind him. But even as he scooted into the room, Kenton noticed the motorcycle with its side car parked in the yard.

IN THE second it took to reach the three in the center of the room, Kenton saw the woman, her woollen dress half torn from her body, her face stricken with a look of horror. In that second he saw her face and never forgot it; with the twin trickles of blood running from her nostrils and the lopsided look of it.

Then he was on the soldier in front of him. The German was tugging at a holstered pistol. He never knew what hit him! Kenton had brought the stiffened side of his palm down in a mighty, savage sweep across the side of the bent head. It caught the man on his neck. There was a sound as of a breaking limb and the man fell face downward onto the floor.

Andre wasn't doing so well with the other soldier. The German, much taller and heavier than Andre, had managed to weather the storm of punches thrown at him and had grabbed Andre in a bear hug. Now he was trying to bend his opponent over a table with the obvious intention of breaking his back.

He grunted softly and straightened up. His eyes protruded slightly as he stared unseeingly at Kenton. He gulped suddenly and blood spewed from his mouth. Then his knees gave way and he fell, his chin striking against the edge of the table. He fell flat on his face. The knife hilt in his back stuck straight up.

The woman stood above the dead soldier and looked down at his body. The blood still dripping from her nose splattered against the knife hilt.

Kenton leaped to one of the two windows the house boasted. There was no one out there. Andre, on seeing Kenton move, went to the other window. Then he came back to the woman, and removing his jacket, torn as it was, placed it over her bare shoulders. If she felt it, there was no sign on her features. She stood and looked empty-eyed at the dead body.

Words came from her lips, words which made Andre stop short and listen. To Kenton's surprise, Andre answered her. She looked at him not believing her ears. Then she did a surprising thing. She burst into tears.

Kenton turned away in embarrassment. He looked around the room curiously. He had never seen anything like it before. It was a large square room which served as living quarters and kitchen. For in one corner was an old fashioned brass bed. A large open fire place took up an entire side of the house.

Andre and the woman were deep in an argument. At least that's what it sounded like when Kenton looked at them again. He heard Andre say, "No, no," several times and saw her shake her head vehemently about something. Andre gave in at last to her demands, for he shrugged his shoulders in a helpless gesture, got off the bed and came over to Kenton.

"Lets have the gun, Don," he demanded.

"What for?"

"She wants it!"

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"What the hell's she gonna do with it?"

"Put a bullet in the dead guy's head." He pointed to the one Kenton had killed.

Kenton handed the gun over and said:

"I don't get it. He's dead, isn't he? What does she want to shoot him for?"

Instead of answering, Andre walked back to her and gave her the pistol. She murmured something and, getting up, walked to the door with him. Andre motioned for Kenton to follow. She pointed to another house about thirty yards away and said something in an explanatory voice. Andre nodded his head in understanding.

"Okay Don, we're set. Let's go!"

HE STARTED off at a trot for the house. Kenton followed. A heavy door barred their entrance. Andre pounded on it. The door opened wide enough for a head to appear in the crack.

Kenton had never seen a man who looked like the one who faced them in the opening. Dark eyes, sunk in sockets only hunger could have hollowed, stared sullenly at them. The cheeks, thin, gaunt and lined, were covered by a bristling growth of beard.

Andre said something in a rapid, commanding voice. The response was instantaneous. The door opened wider and they were motioned inside. Two men sat by a table near a fire-place. They looked up, startled at the Americans' entrance. But a word from the host reassured them.

As Andre and Kenton waited, the man who opened the door, engaged in a low-voiced conversation with his two friends. While they were talking, Andre told Kenton what it was all about.

"While I've got the chance, here's the lowdown. We're in Greece, about forty miles from the Albanian border. There's been guerilla activities around and the Germans have occupied the town. When the woman found out we were Americans, she told me to come to this guy. He'd give us shelter until dark."

"Uh-huh. I got it. Knew we were in Greece when you started talking to her. But I still don't get the idea of the pistol."

"The motorcycle, Don. She had to do it. Somebody's going to notice that those Germans are missing and start looking for them—" He stopped as the sound of a pistol shot echoed through the room. It was followed by another. Then silence settled down on the room. Kenton understood them. The woman was going to take the rap for them. She had probably shot the dead soldier behind the ear to obliterate the mark which Kenton's blow had made. The simple, heroic action of the woman shook him to his soul.

Oddly enough, the three seated at the table evinced no curiosity about the shot. They had learned not to be too curious about such things. The one who had opened the door called Andre over and now the four had their heads together. After a few minutes of this discussion Andre called Kenton:

"Come here, Don. I want you to meet these men."

He introduced Kenton to them. Each arose in turn and shook hands solemnly. Kenton knew only that they bore outlandish names. Then their friend took them to the fire-place. There was a strange smile on his face as he did so.

Taking a stick, he scattered the blaze until an open space, about two feet across was cleared on the floor. He poked around the embers with the stick until he found what he was searching for. It proved to be an iron ring. With Andre's aid, he lifted the heavy wooden

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trap-door to which the ring was attached. A series of steps were revealed.

They descended the stairs, which led to a wide, clean basement. The stone floor was covered with clean straw. A rude pallet was in one corner. They made themselves comfortable and Andre launched into the story of the three men and woman.

"GET the set-up, Don," he began in a low voice. Don *felt* the fire of the great inner excitement Pete was feeling. These three guys upstairs are guerillas. But the McCoy. They belong to a regular organization led by some guy named Sefaris—Colonel Sefaris—and they've been giving the Germans hell. Dynamiting munitions dumps, trains and roads. They've raided small garrisons in isolated towns. Just raising hell in general."

He paused for breath and Don filled the pause by asking curiously:

"How do you know all this? And what're you so heated up about?"

"The woman told me part—they told me the rest." There was an odd gleam in his eye. "Sure I'm heated up," he continued. "These men and women are doing what I'd been told must be done, '*Fight* for liberty and justice' my father used to say. 'No matter what the odds against you—you will conquer.' Too bad he didn't follow his preaching."

"Take is easy now, Pete," Kenton cautioned. He had seen the marks of bitterness come out around Andre's mouth.

"I'm okay," Andre answered. "But I wonder what they'll say when they find out who my father is."

"What difference will it make?" Kenton said impatiently. "We're blowing out of here to some place where we can find a way to get to Italy."

"Yeah? Better stop thinking that, Don."

"What d'ya mean?"

Andre laughed, but he was very serious when he answered:

"Look Don. We're in an occupied country. There's no out for us. So we've joined up with Colonel Sefaris' guerillas."

"*We've* joined?" Kenton exclaimed.

"Sure. That's what the chin waving was about, upstairs. We stay down here until nightfall. Then they're coming for us."

Kenton looked at Andre as if he couldn't believe his ears. What had come over him? What had happened to have changed him so? This couldn't be the same Andre who had permitted a man to slap his face. Or who had shown such indifference at what was going on around the world.

"Say!" Kenton exclaimed. "What's got into you, Pete? What's it all about?"

Andre answered and Kenton marveled at the change, moral and mental, that had taken place.

"It was that woman," Andre said. "She made me realize what it was all about. Not alone by what she did, but by what she said. How simply she put it! Don, somebody put the finger on this little town. So the Germans came down one day last week to establish order here. They claimed some of the men were members of this Elas gang. This outfit of Colonel Sefaris'. They were right too. Most of the men were. So the Germans took roll call of the townspeople. And then—" he paused and Kenton held his breath—"they took one out of every ten—and shot them."

Kenton let out his breath in a sigh of horror.

"You mean—children and women too!"

"That's right. That woman's husband and daughter were murdered that

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day. Those two Germans, Don, were part of a searching party, sent out to find evidence of the people's guilt."

Kenton didn't have to hear the rest. He had the whole picture. He and Andre had arrived just in time. The soldiers were going to have some sport first. And the woman, after Andre had explained who they were, had unhesitatingly decided on her course of action.

"It came to me there, Don. This is my country! And what have I done to help? Nothing! I know, Don. You can say: so what *can you* do? Well, maybe nothing. But whatever it will be, I'll have tried."

Kenton understood. Andre had spoken calmly, without dramatics or heroics; simple determined sentences. And Kenton understood; they were going to join the guerillas. It was as simple as that.

Better get some sleep, Pete," he said. "We can use as much rest as we can get in."

WITHOUT a word, Andre stretched out on the blanket covered boards of the bed and was instantly asleep. But sleep did not come so easily to Kenton. The silence of the basement was as the silence of a tomb. Not the slightest sound broke the quiet. He kept turning the situation over in his mind but he could not visualize the future. He was certain of one thing, though. Those peasants upstairs, starved, beaten, oppressed, bore a great hatred for the Germans. And hate, even when its weapons are primitive, can do mighty deeds. He did not know how long it took to fall asleep. He was awake one second, asleep in the next.

A sound broke their slumber. It was the creaking, squeaking sound of badly-made shoes rasping over the straw-covered floor.

Kenton felt Andre stir and sit up, even as he was doing the same. A voice, harsh and gutteral said something in the darkness and he heard Andre reply. Then the singer whispered:

"This is it, Don. Take my hand and follow me."

Andre's slender, strong fingers closed around his and he slithered across the floor in groping steps. He felt Andre pause and bumped him gently. A crack of light widened into a square above their heads. Someone had opened the trapdoor. They ascended quickly.

Two men were waiting for them. They were joined by their guide and Kenton saw they were the same three who had been there that morning. Two candles sent feeble, flickering light over the barren, empty room.

"You are ready?" asked one. He was short, stocky-framed, with immense shoulders. His parted lips revealed rotting teeth. He had not shaved for a long time.

"Yes," answered Andre. "We are ready." He looked at the other two as he answered. He was quick to notice a strange feature common to the three men. They were unlike physically; for one was short and broad and another tall and lean and the third was an old man. Still the three looked alike in one respect—their eyes! They all held the same burned-out, empty look. As if they had seen death and worse many times, all were no longer interested in life. Andre had the feeling, they would *welcome* death.

Suddenly the old man cackled in laughter.

"Hee-hee! So the young sprigs are ready. Good! The German swine came this morning. Old Georgi was warming his bones over a fire, here in the hearth. Hee-hee! I laughed to myself, even as they cuffed me, to think below the fire were two for whom the swine would pay good gold."

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"Shut up!" said the stocky one, not unkindly. "Your words are as the ravings of a mountain wind. They took Stephane away," he said to Andre. "The old man saw them. She was already not far from death. I hope it came soon." His voice was flat, unemotional. Andre shivered at the words.

"Come," he went on, "another hour and the moon will rise. It will be too late then."

He turned and started for the door. Andre and Kenton followed. The two peasants brought up the rear. Andre's eyes went wide, as they passed what had been the house of the woman called Stephane. It had been burned to the ground.

THEY had been walking for days, it seemed to Andre. A sickle moon burned silver in the sky. Directly ahead of him was the bent, plodding figure of their stocky guide. Behind him, he could hear the gasping sound of Kenton's breathing. And every now and then a muttered curse, as Kenton stumbled over loose shale, or tripped over a trailing branch. The other two peasants were somewhere in the rear. He caught quick glimpses of them now and then, as they crossed open ground.

Fall came early to these mountains. A sharp wind tore through the thin material of Andre's clothes. Despite the heat induced by the labor of the climb, he felt cold. As if their leader had a sixth sense in such matters, he stopped suddenly and raised his hand. Andre joined him. In a few seconds Kenton came panting to a stop beside them. While they waited for the other two, the leader said:

"We—will rest here—and eat. Another four hours should see us through."

Andre translated to Kenton, who sighed and sank wearily to the ground.

"Man!" he said in a tired voice. "This is worse than an Elk's initiation."

Andre smiled, but he was watching the old man and the tall one dragging several dried branches to where the three were resting. He marveled, watching the old man. Georgi looked like he was in his seventies, but there was nothing old about his walk or in the manner in which he set about building a fire.

"Yes," said the short one, who had come up, "we grow them strong in these mountains." It was as if he had read Andre's mind. "The old man will know eighty soon. But he can outwalk even John, there." He pointed to the tall, silent Greek, who was sitting cross-legged on the ground, intent on the fire Georgi was starting.

Andre saw their guide had picked a narrow opening between the trees, for their camp. The forest hung close about them. Their fire could not be seen from twenty yards off.

The singer and Kenton joined the three around the fire.

"Here," said the short one to Andre and Kenton, "is something to eat. Not much. But they leave us little else."

It was a narrow segment of rank-smelling goat's cheese. Andre took it, broke it into two even parts and handed one to Kenton. His ears heard his friend mutter, "nuts! Cheese! I haven't eaten in days, it seems. So I get cheese," but his senses were on the forest, the fire and the three men seated around it. A strange feeling of ease and content filled his soul. It was as though he had come home. And more. As though all this was, as he had wanted it to be. He began to sing in a low voice. It was a folk song, old when Greece was young: a song of heroes and gods: a song of war!

The Greeks, stolidly munching their cheese, turned as he sang and listened open-mouthed. It was old Georgi who broke the silence, when the song was

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done:

"Aie! I heard that song on my father's knee; as he heard it from his. And so it was sung through the ages. Even now this old blood is stirred to hear it again. Sing once more!"

Andre did as he was bid. At the finish the two Americans were amazed to see the tall Greek burst into tears.

"Hey! What goes here?" Kenton murmured.

"That is good!" said the short Greek, who was sitting beside Andre. "He held his grief too long."

"What—happened?" Andre asked.

"His two sons—youngsters both—were beaten to death by the Germans," the other explained softly.

Mitro, the guide, permitted him a few moments of grief, then he gave orders to start on the march again.

THE way had been hard before. But now it was doubly hard. Mitro was choosing the roughest, wildest, most circuitous path to their rendevous, it seemed. Dawn was breaking when Peter saw they had arrived on a narrow, wooded plateau. Mitro waited for the rest and, when they all gathered, shouted out an unintelligible phrase. Peter wondered why. He had the answer in a few seconds.

A half dozen men came out from the edge of the forest land. Each was armed with a rifle and a bandolier of cartridges. A knife hanging from a belt showed its ugly, sharp edges. For a second, the six, their rifles held at the ready, stood silently watching Mitro and his friends. Then one shouted:

"Ho! It is Mitro, John, and the old one."

Mitro grinned broadly, as the six armed men advanced.

"Tonio!" he shouted warmly. "It is good to see you!"

They embraced on meeting. Then Mitro introduced Peter and Don. Tonio shook Peter's hand in a grasp so hard, the singer's fingers felt numb for several minutes.

"Your mission? It went well?" Tonio asked as the group moved toward the forest trail from which Tonio and his men had come.

Mitro's face darkened in anger.

"No!" he exclaimed and spat on the ground. Peter paid close attention to his words. "We were betrayed! Before our men could accomplish their mission, the Germans had arrived. The element of surprise was gone."

"What happened?"

"Some escaped—the rest—"

"I see. And these two?" Tonio's head jerked toward the two Americans.

Mitro told him what had happened to Peter and Don.

"So! Colonel Sefaris will be glad to see them."

"Colonel Sefaris—here?"

"Aye. There are big things in store."

Peter noticed the news of Sefaris' arrival created a profound impression on Mitro.

They traveled for an hour over a narrow trail. Then almost without warning, they were in the open. A dozen camp-fires lit a large open space. Tents sprawled their brown shapes in twenty places. Peter and Don saw that there were several hundred men there.

Tonio took them to the largest tent in the encampment. An armed sentry barred their entrance. He permitted them to enter when Tonio explained why he wanted to see the Colonel. Besides Tonio, only Peter, Don and Mitro were permited entrance.

Four men were inside. One—tall, slender, lean-faced with dark clean-trimmed mustache—was garbed in the uniform of a Greek officer. The others were dressed in rough, peasant clothes which Mitro and all the rest seemed to

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favor.

The four turned questioning glances in the direction of Peter and Don. The Americans were quick to note the absence of military formalities. The Greek officer greeted Mitro familiarly:

"Ah! Mitro! I am glad to see you back safely."

"Thank you, Colonel Sefaris," Mitro said. Peter noticed how alive his eyes had become at the warm welcome. "I have come to report—"

"I know," the Colonel broke in. "I have the reports. Thirty men killed: forty captured: three escaped."

Mitro hung his head.

Colonel Sefaris walked up to him and slapped him on the back.

"Do not feel so bad, man. It was not your fault."

"There is a traitor among us," Mitro said fiercely, looking up.

"Perhaps," the Colonel answered, paused and asked, "Who are these two? I have never seen them before."

Andre spoke for Don and himself. The Colonel heard him through; then said, in English:

"So you are Americans! Good! And you wish to volunteer your services. Excellent! We can always use men."

"Thank you, sir," said Peter. "Let me introduce ourselves. I am Peter Andre and this is Don Kenton."

"And I am Efran Sefaris, boulevardier, *bon-vivant*, and at present, Colonel in this irregular army," said Sefaris grandiloquently. "May I also present Captain Dumont of the American Army and Captain Smythe of the British Army." He gestured to each of the men in turn.

Peter looked at them, amazed. These rough-looking bearded peasants, army men!

Captain Dumont's eyebrows were knitted in thought.

"Andre, Andre," he said slowly. "The name is familiar— Of course!" he suddenly exclaimed. "The singer! How on earth did you get here?"

Peter recited their adventures again. At the conclusion, Sefaris congratulated them and said:

"So you want to fight, eh? Well I think I can give you a belly full. But first you must learn to be one of us. I will put you into the care of Mitro and his friends. In a month, perhaps, you will know how best to kill a German. Or dynamite a train or road."

IT TOOK a month. The longest, hardest month either had ever experienced. They were taught how to use a knife by the old man, Georgi, who would say, as they practiced with the naked blades against each other, "Remember! A throat, slit well, can never be patched." Then he would laugh that high, insane cackle. But he had the cunning of a wild animal. And he was a wonderful teacher. As was Mitro, who showed them how to use dynamite, where to put it—deep or shallow, how to cover it for explosive effect. And Tonio, who taught them how to be hidden, even in the open, to walk silently, even on straw. But it was tall, silent Greek, John, who taught them the most valuable lesson: how to kill without the use of arms. With bare hands and kicking feet!

It took a month! But at the month's end they were as their companions in looks and in spirit. Even Don, who had entered only half-heartedly into it, had found a feeling akin to joy in learning the art of war. It would have been a wonderful month were it not for a Captain Estamos, their commanding officer.

After leaving Colonel Sefaris, Tonio took them to the tent of Captain Estamos. He proved to be a slender man, immaculately dressed. His face was hard, thin-fleshed. His nose was a curv-

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ing hawk's-beak set beneath bitter, sardonic eyes. His twisted mouth dripped venom when Tonio told him of the Colonel's orders:

"So now we train pups to learn a war dog's trade," he snarled.

"War dogs are not born so, Captain," said Tonio quietly.

"Silence! Who are you two?" Estamos demanded.

Peter told him.

"How is it you speak Greek so well?" the Captain asked. "Your name is Andre. That is not Greek."

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

Estamos' eyes narrowed in a searching glance.

"You look familiar. No—" he stopped Peter as he started to interrupt "—I have not see *you* before. But your face! It reminds of another."

Don, who had been watching and listening with interest, saw Peter go pale. He knew something was wrong. When, after a few more words, the captain dismissed them, he asked:

"What's wrong, Pete?"

"Looks like trouble, Don. I think Estamos sees my father in me. I resemble him very much."

"Oh, oh! That's not so good," Don lamented softly. "He might give us trouble. We better stay out of his way."

Oddly enough, Estamos seemed to have forgotten the incident. Although he snarled and barked at them whenever he saw them, his actions were the same toward even the oldest veteran. He was a hard taskmaster who demanded perfection—and got it.

FIVE weeks had gone by when Peter and Don were summoned to the Colonel's tent. On their arrival, they found Captain Estamos there. He and the Colonel were standing before a large scale map of Greece, which was tacked onto the Colonel's desk.

The Colonel shook them each by the hand.

"I have excellent reports about each of you," he said jovially. He seemed even more exuberant than when they had first seen him. "Especially of you, Andre. Your singing has helped the men's morale considerably. That is good. But I have called you here for a more important reason than that of compliments." He paused and grinned suddenly.

"The day has come," he announced joyfully, "when my little irregular army is called upon for its most irregular action. See here," he pointed to a spot on the map. Peter and Don crowded close to the desk. The Colonel's finger was on a spot marked Parga. "Tonight an allied fleet is going to establish a beachhead there!"

The statement wrung startled gasps from the two Americans. Europe was to be invaded through the back door. Through Greece and Bulgaria. They waited for the Colonel's next words with bated breath. He was no longer jovial.

"Timing! Surprise! Those are the two points to remember! Else the operation fails. For the Germans, realizing the advantage of establishing a beachhead here, have heavily fortified the area—waters are mined—a large garrison is quartered there.

"Now here is the plan in outline. The enemy has a powerful radio transmitter there; the largest in Greece. We also have a Free Greece transmitter there, well hidden. The underground has been notified of their part. I am sending Captain Estamos with a picked party of men to contact the underground. He will seize the German radio station at the proper moment. You, Andre, will be taken to the Underground radio. Co-incident with the seizure of the station, you will begin to

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broadcast the message I give you. It will notify the fleet that operations are progressing as planned." He handed Andre a small sealed envelope.

"Kenton, I am sending you to the coast also. A fishing smack will make rendezvous with the fleet. You will be on that smack. Here," he reached into a desk drawer and pulled out a sealed envelope. "A detailed map, necessary to the operation, is in that envelope. It is for the Military Commander."

He paused for a second, then said softly:

"That is all, gentlemen—good luck and God speed."

"I don't get it," said Don, as they walked toward their tent. "If we're going to take over *their* radio, why use the Underground's?"

"Because," Peter replied, "German Field Headquarters are tuned in to that frequency. They'll know something's wrong the second we start broadcasting. And they'll investigate."

"I get it!" cried Don. "Surprise. We lose that, if they send planes and men."

"Right, Don. And something else. Mitro was telling me that every Greek city has Patriot groups, ready to go into action and only waiting for something like this to happen. If we mess it up, they'll get it; bad!"

"But look—" Don was puzzled—"the Colonel said the town was heavily garrisoned. I don't see how fifty of you guys are going to get anywhere."

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"He's probably got something up his sleeve, I'm sure. Anyhow, Don, I won't see you until it's all over. So, good luck and take it easy."

"Thanks, chum. And same to you."

They shook hands. Their parting was almost casual but each felt deeply the dangers of the other's mission.

Mitro and John were waiting for Peter when he returned to his barracks. There was a look of eager expectancy on their faces. As if they had been waiting a long time for this day.

"You're both going?" asked Peter.

Solemnly, the two nodded their heads.

"Yes," answered Mitro. "We are to guide you to the cobbler shop where the transmitter is."

"Fine! It will be good to have you with me."

PETER'S every sense was alert. Every nerve in his body was alive to the danger they were in.

Fifty of them started out. Fifty ragged peasants; bearded and dirty looking. Captain Estamos, as ragged as the rest, led them. They had traveled down the long, rocky slope of the mountain until they reached a series of low hills. From the summit of one of the hills, they could see the blue horizon of the sea. They could also see Parga, a speck of color against the blue, nestling protectively against a hillside slope. They continued to march in a body until they reached the last of the hills. Here Estamos brought them to halt. A blood-red sun was sinking below the horizon.

"All right, men," Estamos began. "You all have your instructions. Squad leaders check your watches with mine. The time is now, precisely, seven."

There was an instant of quiet activity. Peter looked to his wrist watch also. It showed seven.

"Very well," Estamos continued. "At exactly nine, you will put into effect the instructions you have received. From here on into Parga, you will be on your own. Remember, the future of Greece may lie in *your* hands." He stopped talking and the party of men began to disintegrate. Just as Peter started to leave, Estamos called to him:

"Andre!"

Peter walked over to him. There

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was an odd gleam in the Captain's eyes.

"So Leonardo Myloris' son is to play hero, eh?" he asked.

Peter went pale. So Estamos knew! The sneer in his voice told of what he felt.

"No!" said Peter in a low voice. "I am not a hero—nor do I play at being one. What my father did, I regret. But I shall do as I feel right."

"Yes, I suppose so," Estamos answered. There was something odd in the way he said it. Peter tried to figure out what it was but could only surmise that the Captain was warning him not to do as his father had done. He turned and walked back to Mitro and John.

Mitro took the lead. It didn't take long—an hour, and they were at the edge of Parga. It was already dark but Mitro seemed to see in the dark, as well as in the light. He led them down the slope of a narrow, deserted, cobble-stoned street. Once they heard the measured tramp of a patrol making the rounds. They found refuge in a darkened area-way. Again, they turned a corner and ran smack into a lone German soldier, drunk. John made short work of him. They weren't far from the water front when Mitro stopped them, for Peter could plainly hear the sound of water breaking against the stone quay.

"Here," he said, pausing before a low, stone house, "is our destination."

Cautiously, he poked at the window—darkened door. It squeaked slightly, as it opened.

COLONEL-GENERAL HEINRICH Von Fannstein flicked his riding crop caressingly across his thigh. It was a well-known gesture of his. He was leaning against the desk in his private office in the military headquarters of Parga. Two sentries stood at rigid attention by the doorway. Between them stood a slender peasant, ragged and unkempt.

Von Fannstein dismissed the guards with a gesture of his riding crop. The two German officers in the room with the General, stood at watchful ease.

"So you are Captain Estamos, eh?"

"Yes, General," Estamos said easily, in German.

"Um h'm. Have good reports on your work."

"Thank you, sir. But tonight I bring news of the utmost importance."

"So?"

"The Allies plan to establish an invasion beachhead—on Parga—tonight! I, myself, have led fifty men into town, whose purpose it is to capture the radio station!"

Estamos' words caught Von Fannstein by surprise. The riding crop was arrested in mid-air.

"So," Von Fannstein said softly. "Tonight, eh? And I suppose you have the plans in detail?"

Estamos nodded.

Von Fannstein brought out a detailed military map of the town and Estamos showed all the centers of Underground activities and from where the Germans could expect trouble. The three Germans bore broad smiles when he was done.

"Excellent!" Von Fannstein said approvingly.

"Already I have a plan to trap them. I will radio headquarters to send a division of armor from Margariti. Then we will permit the enemy to land."

He had been pacing back and forth across the room. He stopped and asked Estamos:

"You say one of them has a message he is to broadcast?"

"Yes, sir. And if I may make a request . . .?"

"Yes?"

"I would like personally to lead the

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men you send to this cobbler's shop.

"Granted."

PETER peered into the smoke haze thrown off by the sputtering flame of an oil-burning lamp. An old man sat hunched up before a narrow work bench. Near-sighted eyes peered uncuriously at the three men who had entered. Mitro took the lead. He walked up to the seated figure and said in a low voice:

"Greece cannot die!"

The old man nodded solemnly and motioned with his head for them to follow him. They walked around the partition which separated his work room from the rest of the shop. He led them to a door, which, when opened, revealed a storeroom for leather. It was empty now, but for several large pieces of rotting leather. The old man kicked the leather aside and rapped smartly on the floor with his heel. He stepped aside and part of the flooring slid into a grooved section. The old man motioned for them to descend.

Peter looked around him with unbelieving eyes. A small transmitter stood on a bench in one corner of the room. It was attached to a small motor which was run by several large storage batteries. The set had a limited range but he realized it was sufficient for their purposes. They had been greeted warmly by the two men who had been there.

"Well, Peter," said Mitro after they had made themselves comfortable, "how long do we have to wait?"

Peter opened the envelope given him by the Colonel and silently read the contents. The message read:

"At precisely nine-fifteen you will broadcast this message in English. Proceed as according to plan. Attack has begun to draw off the garrison. Signed, Colonel Sefaris."

"Exactly two hours, Mitro," said Peter.

Suddenly there was the sound of the shoemaker's heels on the floor. Quickly, one of the two men they had found there, stepped to the side of the stairway and pressed a knob. They watched wide-eyed as Captain Estamos descended the stairs. He was grinning broadly. He came toward the frozen group, with dainty cat-like steps. The man who had pressed the knob backed carefully away from him. Peter saw why. Estamos held a Luger pistol in each hand.

"You will hold your hands over your heads and turn with your backs to me," came the command.

For a second Peter thought to risk going for the knife in his belt but reason told him not to. Estamos herded them into a corner farthest from the transmitter. Suddenly there was the sound of a body falling down the stairs. Peter turned his head and he saw the old man, his head a bloody smear, lying on the basement floor. Then there were the sounds of heavy feet descending and rough, guttural voices. Peter didn't have to see them to know they were German soldiers.

"You may turn now," commanded Estamos.

Peter saw there were a dozen men in the group. Two were at the transmitter, one with ear-phones on and the other at the generator.

Bitterness and hate filled Mitro's voice as he said:

"So the traitor was Captain Estamos!" His voice rose in fury: "You dirty Fascist swine! You rotten—" He moaned and slumped to the floor, blood streaming from nose and mouth where Estamos had raked him with the pistol.

Estamos was no longer smiling. He commanded the soldiers to bind Peter and the rest after he had searched for and found the message. Avidly his eyes

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read the contents.

"Do not worry," he said slyly, "the allied fleet will receive this message. I will see to it. But the consequences will not be as they are hoping. No indeed. The trap is even now being made ready for them. But enough of this. Throw these swine in the other room."

It was then that John—the silent one—made his move. With an inarticulate cry of rage, he hurled himself at Estamos. The traitor fired even as he stepped backward but the shot went wild.

PETER and the rest went into action with John's wild leap. For a few moments the issue was in doubt but there were too many of them for the Greeks. One by one they were clubbed into submission. Peter almost succeeded in doing what he wanted, ruin the transmitter, when he was struck down.

Waves of pain made red the blackness of his awakening. He was lying in darkness, relieved only by the small light from the glow of the basement lights as seen between the chinks of the wall. He was lying on the stone floor of the storeroom adjoining the basement. He knew he was not alone, for he could hear the bubbling, labored breath of some one not far from him. But how many there were, he had no idea.

He moved, rolling over on his face, and the pain of moving made him bite his lips. His hands had been bound behind his back. His face felt stiff and numb—his lips, when he passed a thick tongue over them seemed twice their normal size. The Germans had gone over him pretty thoroughly.

The sound of voices in the other room brought back full consciousness. With it came the realization of Estamo's impending treachery. He could hear the gloating tones of the traitor, as his voice came thinly into the room:

"Two more minutes, Captain Ernst, and I shall open the trap. It is an unlucky coincidence—for the Allies—that I speak English, no?"

Laughter answered the query.

For the first time Peter knew panic. Savagely, forgetful of the pain, he twisted his bound hands, trying to loosen the knots. But it was of no avail. His threshing movements made someone ask:

"Who is it?"

Peter recognized the voice. It was Mitro. Desperately, for time was short, he whispered in reply:

"Mitro! Quick! See if you can roll over to me. We must stop them!"

His ears, attuned to the smallest sound, heard Mitro's moans of pain as he struggled to roll closer to Peter. It seemed like an eternity before Mitro reached him, an eternity for both. Mitro's legs had been broken in the struggle and the smallest movement was agony for him. Yet, by some superhuman means, he managed to roll to Peter.

He lay, panting horribly, next to Peter for a few seconds.

"Quick, man! See if you can undo the knots!" Peter begged.

He felt the other's fingers fumbling at the ropes. Seconds, which seemed hours long, went by. Then he heard Mitro gasp:

"I can't! My fingers don't have enough freedom."

Peter realized how hopeless it was then. Mitro had been bound also. They were lying back to back and Mitro found it impossible to get at the knots of the rope around Peter's wrists.

Peter Andre Myloris had never known the desire to pray. God had never been more than just a figure of speech to him. Therefore he could not understand why he held an overwhelm-

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ing desire to pray. Almost tearfully and from deep within his heart he sent a silent plea for succor. The answer was almost immediate. There was a blinding, sense-overpowering flash of light and a figure was seen in the golden glow of the strange light. Peter recognized the figure instantly. It was his father!

DON KENTON watched with a sober intensity the pacing figure of Admiral Lloyd Comstock.

He was amazed at the almost casual ease with which he had made contact with the invasion fleet. He had been taken, early that afternoon, to a rocky, hidden inlet. A small sailing vessel rocked gently on the smooth swell of the sea. His arrival on the boat created no interest. Perhaps the half-dozen sailors on the vessel spoke no English. Whatever the reason, he was neither asked nor told anything. But as soon as he was aboard, the sails were unfurled and they set off for their destination. Nothing untoward occurred on their four-hour voyage. It was as though they had the sea entirely to themselves.

Dusk had settled on the waters; a dusk unrelieved by even the faintest light, for it was an overcast night and the moon would not make its appearance until late. Don had begun to wonder how long the journey would last, when one of the sailors came down the companion way to the tiny cabin in which he was esconced. Silently he beckoned to Don to accompany him.

Don stood on a slightly pitching deck and looked about him in amazement. In every direction, as far as the eye could see, the water bore black-hulled vessels—the Allied invasion fleet!

A cutter set out from the cliff-like side of the huge battleship nearest the fishing smack. An ensign stepped from the cutter onto the sailing vessel and, after inquiring if he was Don Kenton, asked Don to accompany him. He was brought directly to the Admiral's cabin. It seemed that every high ranking American and British military man on the Mediterranean front was present.

Admiral Comstock had been expecting him, for the first thing he did was ask for the message Don bore.

"Well, gentlemen," he said after reading it, "this is it. We will receive the go ahead signal from the Greek underground radio. Colonel Sefaris will attack from the rear at the same time."

Don noticed how grim they all looked at the news. The Admiral looked at his watch.

"Another hour," he announced.

The hour passed on leaden wings. There was a knock on the door and a sailor made his appearance. He said something in a low voice to the Admiral, excused himself and left.

In a few minutes a sailor came for Don. He followed him to the radio room. The Admiral was waiting for him. The speaker on the radio was turned on. A jumble of sound came from it. It was the strangest kind of sound. As if someone was trying to talk and another was deliberately singing to drown out the speaker's voice. And the singer was succeeding. The speakers words were an indistinguishable murmur. What was strange about the whole thing, was that Don recognized the singer. It was Peter Andre!

PETER couldn't believe what he saw. This figure, shot through with light —his father? Yet there was no mistaking that thin, stooped figure; the ascetic, drawn face with its kind, gentle eyes.

His puffy lips became dry in fear. The figure was an awesome sight. Peter thought he was going mad. The figure

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had spoken. He couldn't believe his ears. The figure was speaking to him.

"My son," it said, "listen to me. Once, the heroes of Greece were saved by Orpheus, whose song drowned out the voices of the Sirens. Tonight, another Orpheus must sing—to drown out the Siren Song of the enemy—and so save again the heroes of Greece. Sing, Orpheus, my son, sing! And I promise you your song shall be heard!"

As abruptly as it had appeared, the figure was gone after his strange command. And with it, the light, too, was gone.

Peter puzzled over the mysterious and awesome happening. "Sing" his father had said. But what?

Softly, Peter began to sing the song of the ancients, the song he had sung for the men around the campfires, the song they loved. He sang softly, yet the sound seemed to fill every nook and cranny of the dark room.

"Sing," the figure had said. And Peter sang—sang until his voice was a hoarse croak. What his song did, what it was supposed to do, he didn't know. He only knew time passed slowly. Mitro seemed to have fallen into unconsciousness.

Then suddenly, the room next to theirs exploded into sound. He heard cries, shots, and a voice in English shouting commands. The door to their prison was flung open and Don Kenton appeared on the threshold.

Later, after Peter's and Mitro's bruises and wounds had been taken care of, Don asked Peter how he managed to get to the radio.

"But I wasn't on the radio," Peter said.

"You *weren't?* Then how in hell did we hear you sing?"

"Wait, Don. Before I tell you about that, what happened? What about the invasion?"

"Oh, that," Don replied airily, as though he had everything to do with it. "The Admiral figured something was wrong. So they put their Alternative plan in effect. Instead of striking at Parga, they landed at Agriapidia. It was a cinch. At the same time, Sefaris hit Parga from the rear. The Germans were so busy getting ready for the fleet that didn't show up, they were caught flat-footed. Then our boys caught them from the side, and it was all over but the shouting."

Then Peter told him about the mysterious appearance of his father. Don looked at Peter as if he thought the strain had been too much for him. Exasperated, Peter turned to Mitro and asked him, in Greek:

"Didn't you see the light and the figure?"

"Light? Figure?" Mitro thought hard. "Yes!" he exclaimed. "I thought I saw a light. A sort of glow. But a figure, no."

"I tell you, I saw the figure of my father, Leonides Myloris," Peter said. Then as he saw the effect the name had on Mitro, he felt an overpowering sense of shame.

"Myloris, your father?" Mitro asked.

"Yes," Peter breathed softly.

"So you are Myloris' son," Mitro said. "Like father, like son."

"What do you mean?" Peter asked wonderingly.

"Your father was a hero, my son. For months he worked with the Germans. But only so he could help in sabotage and the Underground. He was caught two months ago—and executed."

BUY VICTORY BONDS

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Toka ducked beneath his own axe-handle

TOKA AND THE MAN BATS

BY J. W. PELKIE

Out of the night sky came a winged monster, and Toka lost his loved princess and queen of Sandcliff. How could he rescue her from these horrors of far bat-land?

TOKA'S dark hair, glistening against his skull, accented the lean handsomeness of his intense features. His lithely hard body was a tawny tanness in iridescent green shorts. He was the prime exemplar of Sandcliff's three thousand warriors, was their qualified leader. But as he shadowed swiftly and soundlessly up the last verdured slope and into the final dense thicket to rifle his super-keen dark gaze over the blue-lit night scene, he was, by his own emphatic choice, alone against the mysterious enemy.

Directly before Toka a tremendous ledge of black stone, at least one hundred paces wide, stretched smooth and deserted for fully a thousand paces to thick underbrush at its opposite end. Opening centrally onto the back of this immense ledge was the five-hundred-paces-wide arched maw of a colossal cavern. From out it, at brief intervals, wafted hustling, working, grinding, hammering snatches of sound. Toka had only a narrowly angled view, but he could see the cavern's flooring was a continuation of the outer expanse, that the walls and lofty arched ceiling were an overlay of masonries giving off the bright blue. This glowing shimmered on the black floor, radiated from the maw to fan a blue illumination into the local star-pointed night. It cast grotesque light and shadows through the vast, wildly verdant bowl dropping so steeply down from this tremendous ledge. It shadowly revealed the herds of huge red-furred cattle bedded down in the bowl's lush clearings. It glinted faintly on the half circle of towering, brooding, black cliff formations embracing the whole.

But, trusted Toka, it could not reveal the Big Snake, that comparatively small but very fleet dinosaur, on which he had raced with heart-straining desperation over that desolate vastness of night-shrouded red flatlands that stretched away to the north, east and west out there beyond this bowl. And, hoped Toka, it did not reveal his own presence to any keen eyes that should be watching.

No, this complete outer silence, this seeming unguardedness, did not jibe in Toka's swift mind; he was supposed to be expected here this night!

In this uncertainty, Toka again vividly visioned the yellow lines of handwriting that slanted so arrogantly

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across the small scroll of red leather left for him in Roya's wildly disordered bedroom, back on Sandcliff.

To the Sandcliff Prince: When you read this, your fair Princess will be well on her way to my keeping. Should you care to see her again, go this night to the clearing below your cliffed city. Go alone, unarmed, and well before moonrise. There, flash any light three times. My personal man-bat will pick you up and fly you here. For your Princess' sake, I know you will do exactly as I suggest.

Again the knifing fear for Roya slashed through Toka. He seethed to race into that seemingly safe, deserted maw. But one hand impatiently toying the black hilt of his plain, borrowed battle knife, he uneasily considered the huge black stone balcony projecting from the cliff face, this side of the maw and a hundred seventy-five open paces from him. Part of some royal quarters? Fully fifteen paces wide by seventy-five long, its rear half canopied with red fur, the structure was the height of two men from the ledge—a not impossible running leap for one whose daily diet was largely the miraculous, glistening black water berries dug from the shore of the lake below Sandcliff. Yet anyone sitting on the balcony, or standing well back on it, could not be seen from the ledge because of the ornately figurined parapets.

On the ledge's fore edge, out below the balcony, a huge red drum was set beside a large circular stone blinker device mounted on short legs, but both these signal mechanisms were unmanned also.

TAUTLY alert, Toka stepped from concealment and into the blue radiation. At once several drums staccatoed sharply in the cavern's vastness. With trained warrior reflex Toka flashed back into the thicket and crouched with knife drawn. Still no motion on the balcony.

But a mild bustle grew in the cavern, then eight of the inhabitants trotted onto the midsector of the ledge. But they were patiently unalarmed, unsuspecting. And Toka was not surprised at them. Two of the inhabitants were men, one distinctive for lustfully loose lips, the other for wicked scars on his belly. Both were brutally coarse of feature, with their sleekly brawny tan bodies smartly clad in red fur briefs and sandals. Hilts of blue-glowing stone battle knives jutted handily from scabbard, and wicked double-bitted battle-axes of the same glowing material swung easily in their right hands.

The six other members of the group were the men's apparent pawns, the not unfamiliar Man Bats. They were powerfully muscled monsters, their purple skin sheening in the blue glowing, their starkly naked man-like bodies fully twice the size of any human's. Their huge heads were tri-ridged from low foreheads to thick necks, their large eyes yellow and heavy-lidded, their thin noses highly arched and a continuation of the center skull ridge. Their thick lips were the color of their claw-like nails on toe and finger: a bright green. From ankles to shoulder blades, translucent muscular membranes, veined through with flexible tubular ribs, were now pleated at rest. Wing tips reaching to heavily tendoned ankles, the powerful, folded carpal joints rounded above and in back of their massive shoulders.

On inside of left wrists and part way into palms, all Man Bats and men wore disks—apparently signal blinkers; small editions of the huge blinker on the ledge edge—consisting of a blue-glowing wafer of stone movably sandwiched between two of black. With a

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flicking of fingers, the blue wafers were being flashed in and out in testing.

The two men were ribald as they idled. But the Man Bats were silent, were evidently deaf mutes; their masters ordered them about by gestures and by forming fingers swiftly into symbols.

As his superkeen hearing picked up the men's conversation five hundred paces away, Toka intently studied the shreds of the Man Bats' dactylogical language. And Toka learned that Sandcliff had not been wrong in suspecting human minds were the directing force behind the Man Bats and their odd behavior around the Sandcliff area.

But constantly the waiting group scanned the northern night. Waiting for the "Sandcliff Prince?"

THERE was a sudden flurry of blinkerings from upraised left arms. Toka shot his gaze into the night's northwest heavens. Six blue blinkering pin points were two distant v's racing larger from the northwest, from Sandcliff's direction. Likely they were the Man Bats that had been flighting high over the great cliffed city in such seeming innocence, seemingly without any human direction, as twilight had given way to shrouding starlit night; one of the flights of Man Bats that had, for near a month, constantly swooped and circled about Sandcliff, never coming in to land, never returning the waved greetings, never making a hostile gesture or move —until tonight.

Into the blue glow the incoming group of Man Bats burst, arms folded, in prone flying position. The monsters' wings were fully fifteen paces from tip to tip of swiftly rippling surfaces. The wings' leading edges evidently biting into the atmosphere, the rippling remainder of the structures grasped the air and scooped it on back for powerfully smooth propulsion.

Down the arrivals tore in formation, the cool night air whistling shrilly as the gigantic winged bodies sliced it apart. Nearing the ledge the incoming Man Bats flexed their wings to brake their speed, swung their huge bodies down and dropped lightly to standing rest. In the brief melee of dactylogical exchanges between the men and the two groups of Man Bats, Toka was able to see that Sandcliff was the main topic, with derisive remarks as to its "unsuspecting idiots," its easy conquest. But there was no mention whatever of Roya or of anyone seen racing from Sandcliff on a Big Snake.

The returned flight stepped clear and watched the out-going Man Bats prepare. As the two men blinkering to them, these six gigantic Man Bats spread their wings, began rippling them, took a running jump and were airborne, were leveling to arms-folded prone flying position and flowing into twin v's. The night air whistling from their powerful winging, up through the blue glow shot the flight, streaking straight northwest, fading into the direction of Sandcliff, to be there when the full moon rose clear in the east a short time hence.

The group on the ledge was striding into the cavern maw, the Man Bats angling toward the far east side, the two men for the near west. And again the eerie brooding scene was deserted, silence over all, the sky only blinking stars.

Surely if anyone were on the balcony they would have shown themselves during that landing and take-off. But neither the Man Bats nor their brute masters had glanced toward it, had apparently not expected anyone to be watching them.

Damnedly aware of the conspicuous contrast of his bright green briefs and soft sandals to the sheening red fur type worn by the cavern's occupants, the

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difference of his black stone knife to the full complement of blue-glowing stone weapons evidently standard here, Toka again stepped from the thicket. He felt naked in the revealing blue glow. But the power of digested water berries surging through him, his soft sandals barely whispering, he was racing for the near west side of the balcony, was leaping. His reaching fingers caught the carved bottom beading of the balcony. He swung, grasped a figurine, drew himself up to a clinging crouch on the outer side of the parapet. The silence of the night still held. Using surprise should anyone be on the balcony, Toka drew his knife, leaped over the thick parapet and lit in fighting balance.

ONE swift glance catalogued the structure: deserted, with luxurious furnishings of black stone and red fur. Under the canopy to the rear was a black stone door, three paces wide and three men high, set deep in massive black casings. Rifling a glance across the vast ledge below, finding it yet deserted, sweeping the sky, detecting only winking stars, Toka was to the maw-end of the balcony, was peering back into the colossal blue bore.

Set half a pace deep in massive black casings, pairs of black doors, each panel the gigantic size of the one on this balcony, spaced the walls into the converging distance. As Man Bats and men, singly and in small groups, occasionally hurried in and out of them there came, from some of the apparently immense rooms beyond, the feverish hustling, hammering, grinding collection of sounds. But though Man Bats and men entered and exited from this west side's doors, only Man Bats entered or came from the east side doors. Though both stationary blinkers and drums were mounted beside the doors along the west, only blinkers were beside the east doors. Though both sides must have been built by Man Bat labor under human direction, apparently east was Man Bat and west human.

Black numerals were inset over every set of doors. Also over many of the Man Bat doors were the sculptured figurines of females of their specie. One of these femininely designated pairs of doors now swung into an immense, barren, all black entry. Out stepped two huge male Man Bats, carrying between them a huge black stone tray that was pyramided with small, capped, white-glistening urns. The great doors closed themselves as the pair of winged monsters strode for the west side of the cavern.

Toka was back to the balcony's lone door, listening. Silence. As he'd seen the cavern's inhabitants do, he reached up and pressed the triangle of blue-glowing masonry inset on one of the black casings. Toka poised ready as the great door swung softly away, into a deserted corridor that was gleaming black of parquetted floor and glowing blue of masonried walls and four-men-high ceiling. The corridor was not less than five paces wide and was fully fifty paces to the lone, closed door at the opposite end. The gigantic door at the other end, and the two lone ones spacing each wall, were like the balcony's, and apparently of standard cavern construction and operation: black stone panels that were opened by pressing triangular blue insets in massive casings, and were closed—as Toka deduced as he stepped in—by stepping on the immediate floor masonries. And, as proved by the massive doorways, the walls were at least a pace thick.

With impatient, swift silence, Toka was down the silent blue-bright corridor and was listening against the first of the two doors on his right. He heard the softly sawing sounds of a person, evi-

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dently a man, deeply sleeping.

Surely the occupant of this room—of the apparently royal quarters—expected no one from Sandcliff or anyplace else this night.

TOKA was directly across corridor to the first of the two doors on the east, was pressing his ear tight. And exquisitely sweet relief flooded through his fearing being.

"You know, Tanda—" it was the unforgettably melodic rippling of Roya's voice—"I don't think your Man Bats will overcome Toka as easily as they did me."

"Oh, Toka will be glad to come, Roya dear," assured an amused smooth throatiness. "Docile as a Sandcliff goat."

Battle knife glittering blackly in right hand, left fingers reaching up and pressing the blue triangle, Toka crouched to leap in fighting. But the gigantic door never moved the slightest, even under his pushing shoulder. Tight-jawed, he pressed his ear to the panel. Whatever the situation within, Roya was self-possessed, was adroit, intelligent, unafraid—on the surface.

"And when Toka is seen arriving?" She was testing.

The voluptuously throaty Tanda was arrogantly self-sure. "As my servant Man Bat boys did with you, so my personal mount will fly Toka in at an oppriate moment and bring him to me."

"But why do you want Toka and me?"

"Simple, Roya. My brother, Molak, sleeping so innocently across the corridor, has commanded that all Sandcliff males are to be destroyed, to eliminate the breed so it can never threaten us." Tanda was being frank. "I am the only human woman here. As Molak and his men have desires that have long been unsatisfied, so, too, have I. So, before Sandcliff's men are put to death, I'm taking the prime of them all—Toka."

Toka swiftly eyed the door of brother Molak across corridor, the enigmatic doors down the corridor. Attempt to force entry to Roya would no doubt bring Molak and aroused warriors pouring to the scene. Yet any moment one might enter the corridor and find him—one of their intended victims—here.

THE quietly intelligent Roya had shifted her searching. "You've lived here among these Man Bats always?"

The amused Tanda was confidently free, arrogantly factual. "We once lived in Nykola. You wouldn't know of it. It's a great nation of six cities, on an island far out in a vast ocean that washes the far south side of the range of black cliff formations in which this cavern is located."

"Why didn't you stay in Nykola?"

"The Great Molak, as he is known here, made a grab for control of Nykola. He failed, and he and I and all his male followers were expelled to a small barren island midway between Nykola and the shore of black cliffs. We were to perish. But one morning we saw a flight of giant creatures that were winged like bats and bodied like men. They circled curiously over us, approached us cautiously. But we were too weak to show enmity or fight. And a few of them landed near us, obviously wanted to help us. When we nodded acceptance, the rest joined the first. Though the Man Bats normally conversed by gesture and by forming their fingers into symbols, they could also understand our picture questions and answers which we drew in the sand. Learning of their then-crude community here, Molak instantly glimpsed his chance to conquer Nykola, or any na-

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tion, completely. It was not too difficult for the psychologically adroit Molak to get the Man Bats to fly all of us here and then reorganize the creatures to his own ends."

"But if Nykola is the Great Molak's goal," puzzled Roya, "why attack Sandcliff?"

A condescending smile was in Tanda's voice. "When Molak heard of Sandcliff, and had it modeled in all its wealth and beauty, he imbued his Man Bats with hate for it—as a test of their gullibility. That hate is now so intense that I doubt if even Molak himself could stop the Man Bats from destroying Sandcliff. And, too, sacking Sandcliff will give Molak's forces valuable seasoning, so that Nykola's six cities will fall at one swoop." Tanda was again amused. "Besides, Sandcliff women are quite delectible, especially to men so long denied. Oh, the Man Bats have women," mocked Tanda, "but few men have ever seen them, and no man, supposedly, dares violate their quarters, for the great males would fight unto death to avenge them."

Roya was amused now, but intelligently so. "Like all overconfident schemers, Tanda, you've made your mistake."

"So?" purred Tanda.

"I take it Molak is not too dense. By snatching me, by leaving that note for Toka, you've alarmed Sandcliff. Molak's spying Man Bats will report Sandcliff's reactions. Molak will ponder, and ask questions—perhaps question certain Man Bats who serve you." A mocking smile was in Roya's voice. "And I don't believe the Great Molak likes meddling in his plans."

Tanda herself was mocking, was egotistically sure. "Though they also serve Molak, my personal Man Bats dare not tell now. And I have never found Molak too difficult to manage. Besides, Sandcliff could not possibly prepare in time to even hinder Molak. Your wealthy and proud cliff city will be taken almost as easily as I took you." Tanda purred in satisfied conceit. "And that was so simple, Roya. Sandcliff, thinking the daily flights of Man Bats about it were only innocent curiosity, thinking no human mind was back of their curiosity. Sandcliff, sleeping in innocence, the night a shroud, I sending my two servants to your apartment on the east end of Sandcliff's top terrace, the Man Bat boys duplicating Toka's knocking code, your stupid maid opening the door—and you know the rest."

"You are so familiar with Sandcliff that you know Toka's knock?" wondered Roya.

Tanda was superior. "The Man Bats are superkeen of eye. They have reported every detail of Sandcliff life."

Roya was silent a moment, then sober. "Molak's Man Bats are very adroit."

Tanda rippled amusement, was suddenly acidly satirical. "And you think you, too, are very adroit, Roya. You think you have drawn me into telling you all this. You think you shall somehow escape to Sandcliff and report. But I'm sure you realize how unfortunate such an attempt would be."

Roya did not reply to this devastatingly self-sure awareness. And Toka was aroused from the spell of Tanda's tale by her footsteps idling toward the door. "I'm sure you'll not be foolish, Roya, while I take a little breath of air on the balcony."

CHAPTER II

TOKA was swiftly down corridor to the second door on the east, listening against it. Silence. Empty? He pressed the blue triangle. No action.

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And the deep doorway provided hiding only if Tanda did not actually come down the corridor. Expecting Tanda's door to open and she step out to discover him, Toka was across corridor to the second door on the west, was pressing the triangle. The door swung into dimness. Great pyramids of the small, white, capped urns crowded the all-black room. Tanda's door was sighing in action as Toka held his door open a slit and watched up the huge blue-bright corridor.

As Tanda stepped from her room, Toka saw she fitted her voice. She was an arousing voluptuous beauty of creamy tan in frankly fitted briefs of sheening red fur. Her shimmering dark hair, falling in waves to her nudity of shoulders, was banded with a brilliantly flashing tiara that matched her pendant earrings and lavaliered necklace, her finger rings and bracelets on ankle and wrist. As she turned, reached up and pressed unmarked masonries in the gigantic door casings, Toka saw she wore a narrow knife fitted inside the left groin of her snug briefs, the fancily worked blue-glowing handle jutting handily. Half turning, she flashed dark, long-lashed shadowy eyes down the corridor. Toka tauted, held his breath as her full red lips curved an arrogant little smile. But she turned on up corridor, and Toka breathed again. A moment, and the balcony door sighed, and only the arousing perfume of Tanda remained.

Storeroom door closing softly, Toka was to Roya's prison and pressing the secret masonries in sequence, then the triangle. But the great door never gave! Toka's racing mind meshed. He pressed the secret masonries in reverse sequence, then the triangle. The great black door began swinging away. Knife drawn, fighting being singing for possible battle, Toka sidestepped into a headily scented, immense, all-black bedroom that was lilting with eerie shadows and gleaming with flickering yellow candle light.

But Roya!

A coldness clutched at Toka's heart. A square of red fur loosely masking her face from hairline to chin, Roya was tense beside a massive black table, was evidently paused in the midst of searching her way among the ornate black stone and red fur furnishings. Her goldenly shimmering blonde fall of hair brushed about her lucent shoulders. Her feather-light iridescent green briefs of Sandcliff had been torn to inadequacy. But she still wore the emerald bracelet of her Royal lineage. And her creamy tan, slimly curved loveliness of body was unmarked.

Only that mask!

Toka was to her with a whispered, "Easy, Roya."

"Toka!" she gasped in gladness; then beatenly, "So you came."

"Not the way Tanda intended. Let's get that mask off."

"No." The coldly self-disciplined Roya flashed her hands to stop him. "After Tanda's very lucid description of my new beauty, I asked her for this mask."

The iciness vised tigher within Toka. "Why?"

"What is the only known weakness of Sandcliff's water berries?"

"They heal over the burned surfaces and instantly relieve all pain, but won't restore the destroyed flesh or bone underneath."

"Exactly. When eaten, they give tremendous strength, they swiftly heal any injury, restore destroyed tissues—except burned flesh or bone."

"Let me see." Toka snatched the mask up. His breath sucked in with a rasp, his body went rigid as the sick coldness gripped his vitals. Though

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her skin was flawlessly healed over, what had been Roya's lovely face was a sightless horror too ghastly to describe.

Roya was forcedly factual. "In my room on Sandcliff, when I was fighting against capture by Tanda's Man Bat boys, I fell into my candelabra on the table."

JAW muscles knotting with his inner rage, Toka dropped the mask back in place. His voice was quietly stony. "Come on." He impatiently guided her to the door.

The cavernous corridor was silent, empty. In the vast storeroom, its pyramids of small urns giving dim reflection, Toka leaned against the gigantic door in a listening position and comforted the trembling, brave Roya close to him. Each softly, swiftly relating their discoveries so far, Toka further encouraged Roya with his plan for escape: soon as Tanda left the way clear, they'd steal onto the balcony, slip down into the bowl and out to the waiting Big Snake; with the young dinosaur, they'd hide till moonset, then race through the cloaking night for Sandcliff. Roya steadied, clung to Toka in warm, trusting confidence.

But as he held her femininity to himself and caressed the scented silkiness of her blondeness, Toka's compassionate soul ached: Roya! Unable to see again the visible beauties of this life! Her unmatched loveliness of feature destroyed!

Toka, Roya too, abruptly tauted as the balcony door sighed and Tanda's soft footsteps came down corridor.

"What'll she do?" breathed Roya in trepidation.

"Not tell the Great Molak," wagered Toka in reassurance.

Tanda's door sighed open and shut. Holding the tense curvingness of Roya, Toka waited. A few moments, and Tanda's door again sighed in action. Tanda's footsteps paused. Toka could vision those dark eyes flashing up and down the corridor in angry uncertainty. Tanda's footsteps crossed to Molak's door, but only to listen; her feet idled uncertainly, then softly came down the corridor.

Toka eased Roya clear, drew his knife and waited, listening. Tanda went to the door just across the way. Toka heard that door sigh open, Tanda enter, the door shut.

"Come on, Roya."

Toka had the storeroom door open, was searching back with one hand for Roya, could not touch her. The next was an endless nightmare in split instants. Muffled by these stone walls and doors, drums began frantically throbbing an immediately undecipherable code through the cavern, instantly followed by hoarse shouts and a frenzied bustle. Toka was whirling for Roya. A gasp of anguish came from her. By the bright blue reflection from the corridor Toka saw she must have stepped on a loose urn, was now frantically trying not to fall. Even as he thought, he leaped for the falling girl. But too late; she crashed back against a pyramid. With a stony grinding the pile loosened and avalanched with a roar, crashed into adjoining piles and loosened those. And the stony roaring, the drumming and hoarse shouting and running in the cavern, was doom in Toka's ears.

HE CAUGHT the rolling Roya into his arms, whirled for the open door. The bejeweled Tanda was standing before the closed door across corridor, a sardonic smile bitter on her exotic face. Her knife was a blue-glowing viciousness in her hand. The cavern clamor was centered out on the vast ledge now.

Toka heard Tanda's voluptuous

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"Remain here," growled Kola. "When I return, you will be mine."

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throatiness mock through the roar of alarm, "So you had to disobey my directions."

Toka stood Roya clear. His knife was a black glitter in his hand as he closed to silence Tanda.

He was distracted by a door slamming open up corridor and a hard voice crackling with imperial anger, "What's going on in this place?"

The Great Molak, thin sheaths of pale yellow hair tousling his narrow skull, was a lean, hard-muscled devil in red fur briefs and sandals. He poised spraddle-legged on toes, swinging a wicked fancy blue battle-ax, an ornate battle knife ready in waist scabbard. As he apparently decoded the drumming, as his cold green eyes apparently recognized Toka and the masked Roya's royal bracelet of emeralds, his evilly sharp features started, then his cruel thin lips sneered arrogant amusement. With one long-fingered, leanly powerful hand, the vain devil stroked his thin, pale hair smooth.

Tanda took Toka's split moment of indecision to leap for the bewildered, unsuspecting Roya. Toka kicked out, sent Tanda crashing to the black floor and toward Molak.

"Excellent," Toka was startled to hear Tanda hiss. "I knew you'd do it!"

Too far away to have heard Tanda's barely audible remark, Molak was leaping down corridor, battle-ax a blue blur of viciousness. His voice was a cold whip at Tanda. "Get out of my way!" But he weaved to avoid his strangely, clumsily scrambling sister.

The clamor in the cavern and on the ledge had faded on away. Toka whirled for Roya. "Come on!"

He grabbed her arm, rushed down corridor for possible escape deeper in the apartment. But the great door at this end swung in. Toka jammed to a stop, thrust Roya back of him and to the right west wall. The two lithe uglies he'd seen on the landing ledge rushed in, started in surprise, quickly recovered as they cataloged the situation with a glance.

"Ah, Loose Lip and Scar Belly," welcomed Molak, instantly decisive, now that the catch was cornered. "You're just in time."

MOLAK callously straight-armed the deliberately obstructing Tanda aside and closed lazily for Toka and Roya. Battle-axes also whirling bluely about their heads, Loose Lip and Scar Belly were leisurely closing in on the other side. Toka knew Death held the odds here.

Loose Lip's coarse voice was savoring. "Quite a haul, Chief."

"As you no doubt heard from the drums, Chief," rasped Scar Belly with gloating, "a flight returning from Nykola saw a Big Snake, equipped with only two saddles, hidden outside the bowl."

"And," added Loose Lip, "the lads and purple pals are out having a little practice."

"We thought you might like to deliver the final blow, Chief," invited Scar Belly.

Let the lads and our purple pals have their fun out there, boys," smiled Molak. "We'll have ours here."

Toka knew he couldn't possibly kill the trio, but with the mad brains of it gone—

Tanda flipped Toka a staying look, halted his knife arm from starting.

"A thought, O Great Molak," tossed Tanda.

"Yes, little Tanda?" indifferently mocked Molak.

"Our prisoners, alive," insinuated Tanda, "should prove—shall we say useful?—in many ways."

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Molak bit. "Hold it, boys.

His pair poised, ready to butcher the catch on command.

"Yes, Tanda," agreed Molak in oily agreement, "the Sandcliff Prince should prove most useful—for a little while. And as for the masked Princess—" Molak's cold green eyes, as did Loose Lip's and Scar Belly's blazing dark ones, caressed lewdly over the quivering Roya's under-clad beauty.

The seething rage exploded within Toka. His right arm whipped. In the corridor's blue glowing his knife was a black glitter for Molak's naked chest. A hoarse shout burst from Molak's uglies as they closed for Toka. Molak was a dodging streak. But Toka's vicious blade bit, thudded hilt-deep—but only through the lean, hard biceps of Molak's left arm.

"Back!" cracked Molak to his brutes.

His would-be avengers stopped in their tracks, a foully snarling duo three paces clear.

Molak calmly withdrew Toka's knife. Toka watched for [illegible] saw none; the wound was instantly healing sound! Toka's mind rocked; what evil magic did Molak have that so fully duplicated the power of Sandcliff's water berries!

Molak smiled knowingly at Toka's wonder. "And all my lads and Man Bats are likewise affected."

Toka gave no sign of catching Tanda's eloquent eye as she languored beyond Molak. Gently twining his powerful fingers of one hand into Roya's smooth, cool ones to assure the girl, Toka was surfacely indifferent. "Very interesting, Molak." Resistance, struggle now, with the miraculously powerful Molak and equally ready pair could be no gain. Later, with the libidinously hungry Tanda's possible help, perhaps a chance.

"Watch the Princess, boys," ordered Molak.

"A pleasure, Chief."

Toka fought himself rigidly passive as the pair's lewd eyes embraced Roya. Molak's cold green eyes never left Toka's hot dark ones.

Molak was the Royal Master commanding a tolerated inferior, "Tanda, you may go to your room now."

Tanda's narrowed eyes smouldered hatefully at her brother's naked broad back as she turned to obey. Definitely, there was not complete accord here.

"The Prince and Princess," ordered Molak in oily softness, "will turn and face the wall."

ROYA likewise, Toka leisurely obeyed and re-entwined fingers. As his eyes met the blue wall here, midway between the storeroom and the corridor end, Toka saw, before him, one masonry that did not quite tightly join its finely fitted fellows; only a slow, long, close inspection would otherwise have noted the interesting flaw.

"Stand back of them, boys," was commanding Molak. "And see that *you* keep facing them."

"Right, Chief."

What did Molak not want Tanda nor his pair to see? Toka heard Molak step to the door of the room across from the storeroom. At this moment the bustle and ribald shouting returned to the ledge and was joyously entering the cavern; the young Big Snake apparently had been destroyed.

As the door of the room across corridor sighed, Molak again emphasized, "Keep watching them, boys—and don't turn around."

"Right, Chief," reaffirmed his pair.

"Now," mocked Molak's oily voice, "will only the Prince be so kind as to turn around?"

Returning his gentle finger-squeeze of assurance, Roya remained facing

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the wall as Toka, surfacely casual, obeyed Molak. The sleek madman was standing beside the open doorway. By the blue glow reflected in from the corridor, shapes of black-and-red furniture could be made out just beyond the doorway; then thick blackness, relieved only by a small blue glow, some three paces further on, and table-high.

"Your quarters," tendered Molak.

Toka only stood, outwardly relaxed, and levelly met Molak's cold green eyes. "What of Roya?"

Molak's thin lips quirked. "Roya shall enjoy other quarters."

"What kind of other quarters?"

Molak's eyes were green drills, his voice an oily purr. "Oh, Loose Lip and Scar Belly . . ."

"Yeah, Chief?"

"If that questioning oaf is still there when I count to three, we educate him with our axes."

"Right, Chief," hopefully grinned the pair.

"One," began Molak in callous certainty.

DEAD men were useless; with life there was some hope. Shrugging defeatedly, Toka stepped toward the room. The great door swung to behind him, and the only illumination was the small blue glow further on in the room and the thin border outlining the door's roomward side, plus the usual blue triangular inset. Damning whatever might be in his prison, whirling on silent feet, Toka had his ear intent against the giant door panel.

Molak was evidently setting secret, locking masonries. "Okay, boys, all clear; the Prince is tucked away."

"But what about our Princess, Chief?" hoped Scar Belly in personal lust.

"Oh, don't worry about *our* Princess," amusedly understood Molak. "I shall take good care of her—very good care of her."

"Sure, Chief."

"Why be so disappointed?" softly chuckled Molak. "As my Vice-Commanders,—you have first choice, after myself, of all Sandcliff women."

Lascivious anticipation was in Loose Lip's and Scar Belly's, "Sure, Chief."

"One order before you go, boys."

"Yeah, Chief?"

"Post guards everywhere, in case any more of our Sandcliff friends come visiting. Also, just to be safe, make a thorough inspection. Except, of course, let the Man Bats inspect their own places." Molak chuckled almost silently.

"Any guy get near those Man Bats' dames," mused Loose Lip longingly, "I guess he'd have to be blotted up."

The flexibly voiced Molak became bitingly cold. "And just see that you nor none of our lads ever go near those places! They'll have plenty when we take Sandcliff! Now get going!" He was at once quietly oily. "So I may entertain our Princess."

"Right, Chief."

CHAPTER III

TAUT of awryly under-clad body, hands clenched at sides, Roya faced the corridor wall. Arrogantly sharp features wearing a certain anticipation, Molak sauntered toward her.

"You may turn around now, Roya."

Roya obeyed with dignity.

Molak's green eyes played slowly over her lithe beauty. "Very nice," he mused in oily savor. "Much more lovely than your likeness my Man Bats sculptured for me."

Roya made no reply to Molak's not-too-cryptic remark.

"But say," he frowned, "why the mask?" Or are you really the Sand-

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cliff Princess."

Roya's voice was cool, steady, amusedly intelligent. "You don't know?"

"Know what?"

"About my face."

Molak's sharp features became an expressionless mask. "And what about your face?"

"Then you weren't a party to it?"

"I do not care for riddles, Roya," softly warned Molak. "Was I a party to what?"

"Capturing me from Sandcliff, and bringing me here." Roya, too, had detected the inharmony between Molak and Tanda.

Molak was narrowed of eye, hard of face. "So," he mused in oily coldness, "my meddlesome little sister again." Then his sharp countenance reflected his icy consideration. "However, this time she really may have done me more good than she realizes." He chuckled softly. "Of course she really should be restrained from her impetuosity. "But," he centered on the more immediate business, "your face; let me see it."

Roya casually raised her mask. And as her sightless horror stared at Molak, his lips became even thinner; his hard eyes, no doubt used to gruesome views, widened. Then his features recovered into a cold stoniness; his powerfully tendoned left hand toyed his fancy knife hilt; his right hand slowly pendulumed his distinctively ornate and wickedly double-bitted battle-ax.

"Tanda burned your face?" It was more statement than query.

Roya dropped her mask into place. Continuing her role, her voice was quietly jaunty, cooly factual. "I fell into my candelabra on Sandcliff, when I fought against capture."

"Come on," decided Molak in arrogant assurance, "and we'll see what Bat milk can do for you."

"Bat milk?"

"An elixir, of many uses, that we enjoy here." Molak treated himself to a forward-looking smile. "I'm sure you and I shall find it helpful—in many ways."

But only clean hope veined Roya's voice. "You think I shall really see again?"

"If you don't," promised Molak in cold-blooded casualness, "Tanda never will."

GENTLY holding the silent Roya's right elbow with his left hand, Molak guided her into his immense, black - gleaming candelabra - brilliant bedroom. Roya could not see nor know the luxurious quarters were a duplication of Tanda's. Nor could she see that, invitingly posed beside Molak's dressing chest and mirror, was a life-size nude of her, exquisitely sculptured from delicately colored clays.

Flipping his glance from inanimate statue to its living pattern, Molak paused in the forecenter of the room, sat the masked girl onto a luxurious lounge near the massive main table. "Just make yourself at home, while I go pick up the stuff we'll need."

"It's safe?" casually tested Roya.

Molak quirked a pale eyebrow. "Safe?"

"I mean for me. Here."

"No one," amusedly assured Molak, "enters the Great Molak's bedroom without his permission."

"And how will I know whether or not any visitors have the Great Molak's permission?"

"They never have, unless I'm here and give it. However, should any of my female-hungry followers knock, just don't answer or try opening the door. But don't worry, my pet; in the Great Molak's hands you will fare well—very

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well."

Only Roya's fine-fingered hands held each other tighter; her voice still was free and coolly amused. "I'm sure I shall."

The crookedly smiling Molak patted her golden head, then strode to the door.

CHAPTER IV

AS THE hopeful Roya's and the anticipating Molak's light footsteps faded up corridor and into Molak's quarters, Toka pressed the blue-glowing triangle in the casing of his prison door. There was no response; he had expected none. Turning, he felt his way through the dark toward the small blue glow. Coming up against a massive table, he reached out and closed his hand around a smooth, warm, cylindrical shape, that was three hands tall, the cap-like top of which gave off the blue glow. Holding the cylinder safely clear of himself, Toka twisted the cap off. At once, from an apparently ever-smouldering fire, an intense yellow-red tongue of flame, a forearm long, leaped out with a softly fluttering chuckling and sent the eerie shadows scampering about a vast interior.

It was an immense bedroom, fully twenty paces by ten, and four men high; a duplicate of Tanda's, luxurious with furnishings of black stone and red fur, the walls grooved to simulate large squares of masonry. Toka was back to the door. Setting the leaping torch on a nearby small table, he raced his sensitive fingers in search of any combination of secret masonries that might unlock this door. The urgency whipping him, he failed. He decided on the rest of the vast room. The rear seemed strangely without furnishings. Odd. Torch aloft, he was swiftly there, to find a sunken pool, steps centering up to floor level.

He glanced into the clear depths, and felt his naked spine prickle, the hackles on his neck rear up. Resting on the pool's shining black bottom was the body of a human-sized Man Bat, a female of the clotheless specie. In comparison with the males, she was startlingly lovely. Her skull was not ignorant and triridged, but was intelligent, near human, and possessed of luxurious black hair, now restless in the watery depths. But her throat had been slashed open, her winged, purple nakedness bound with black rope and weighted with black stones. Her green-lipped features, almost humanly delicate and fine, were fixed in a terrified expression of violent death. Her soft amber eyes, framed with long black lashes, gazed unseeingly up at Toka.

Molak commanded his men to stay away from Man Bat women, while he indulged his lusts to the limit. But Molak must have known that he, Toka, would discover this crime. So evidently it was not intended that anyone viewing it should ever be allowed to tell of it. Molak was the type who believed that only dead men had silent tongues.

Toka wheeled as the door at the opposite end of the bedroom sighed in movement. Instantly he had capped the leaping torch, held it behind him to shield the glow of its cap. In the sudden blackness, relieved by the widening reflection from the blue corridor, Toka silently felt his way forward, and recognized the curved silhouette and brilliant jeweling of Tanda in the doorway.

"Toka!" came her urgent whisper.

BACK at the massive main table, Toka set the markingly capped torch on it. "Here."

"Come on!" hissed Tanda.

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Toka was with her into the corridor.

Her dark eyes were alight with successful cunning. "Quick! Go to my room!"

Toka glanced back down corridor as he opened Tanda's door. She was reaching up and evidently resetting the secret masonries that locked the prison bedroom. But the angle of sight was not broad enough for him to clearly determine the exact stones. Tanda was silently hurrying toward him, was impatiently gesturing him into her quarters.

As the door closed them into her luxurious, scented bedroom, Tanda pressed a wall masonry. Toka cataloged this lock with a bland glance, then idled on into the forecenter of the room and beside the massive table, on which were three glistening white urns, duplicates of those in the storeroom down corridor, duplicates of the tray full he had seen Man Bats carry from the women's quarters.

"Well, Toka darling," purred Tanda as she stood displayfully close, "here we are."

"What will happen to Roya?" quietly demanded Toka.

Tanda's eyes quipped at him. "You have a man's imagination."

Toka preferred not to dwell on Tanda's eloquent answer. "What's this Bat milk stuff that Molak mentioned?"

"So you were listening against your door too?"

"I asked about Bat milk," pursued Toka.

"Darling, its name should tell you." Tanda's eyes amusedly told him she knew he had deduced the sources of the lacteal fluid. "Here, try some." She twisted the caps from two urns, one for each.

Toka watched Tanda sip long and deeply, then examined his urn. It was self-refrigerating, as the coolness rising to his face revealed. The milk was unlike any, human or otherwise, he had ever seen: a sparkling green; an odor of tang, a taste of exquisite sweetness; cool and refreshing to his palate; a pleasurable sensation in his stomach. He felt that digestive organ permeating it through his fibers in an exhilarating glow—disconcertingly too exactly as with Sandcliff's water berries.

Tanda stood possessively watching. Her implication was low in her throat. "They say it's good for love too."

Toka eyed her sardonically. "Won't the Great Molak wonder what's happened to me?"

"Have you forgotten?" smilingly insinuated Tanda. "Molak has a new toy to amuse him."

Toka fought himself to show none of his seething concern. "But sooner or later he will investigate."

"Not too soon," softly baited Tanda. "In fact, Molak need not deter us at all—not even from acquiring his power and his goal."

"Ah," softly understood Toka. "Conquerors of the world!"

"How well you state it, my Toka!" warmly approved Tanda with flashing eyes. "With your military master mind, and aided by my loving criticism, we shall rule *everything!*"

And Toka realized that, in concern for Roya, he had nigh forgotten the threat to Sandcliff's existence. The vision of all its good folk rose before him to clash with the vision of Roya in foully toying hands. He had to let Sandcliff know of this evil's unsuspected strength, and he had to save Roya! Yet he was a near helpless prisoner in the midst of the enemy, every renegade warrior and Man Bat ready to pounce the instant he showed. There was only one hope—

For Tanda's benefit, Toka shrewdly

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considered. "Sounds pretty heady, Tanda. War lords of the Man Bats —King and Queen of all the world we can know. Yes," he smiled softly, "a very good proposition, Tanda."

"Oh, Toka," rapturously breathed Tanda, "I knew you'd see the advantages!"

ABRUPTLY she hugged herself to him, clung her full lips to his with a warm starvation, strained her firm feminine pressures excitedly to him and vised her smooth strong arms hungrily tighter around his neck. Toka could feel her passionate heart throbbing through her hard pressed breast. Her arousing scent was crowding into his sensitive nostrils, her expressive lips feeding an arousing fire into him, proving his basic male emotions were only too easy to activate. A small panic fluttered his morals, recalled him from the brink. He flashed his hands to Tanda's straining shoulders, tore her fiercely possessive arms from his neck, drew free.

The flushed Tanda rippled a happy laugh in her throat as she idled beside the main table. "You'll learn, my Toka."

He felt his face on fire, but tried for sophistry to cover his anger. "But let's not forget the Great Molak. He may learn too."

"Oh, don't—" The amusedly deprecating Tanda was cut short by an imperious tapping on her door.

Feeling helplessly naked without weapons, Toka drilled a look at Tanda. She sneered toward her door, snatched up her torch. Finger to lips, she beckoned to Toka and swiftly tiptoed to a clear wall area between her dressing chest and a small, bare table. Molak's fist hammered the door. Tanda uncapped her torch, held its tongue of fierce flame up to a square of the black, grooved wall.

Molak's fist punished the door. His vocal whiplash of royal impatience cracked through. "Tanda. Open up!"

"Just wait'll I get some clothes on," indifferently called Tanda.

"Why start being modest now!" mocked Molak.

"Just keep your shorts on," taunted Tanda.

No mechanism so much as clicked under the torch flame, yet a heavy, secret door soundlessly opened. The softly sandaled Toka stepped into a small room; its walls, floor and ceiling of black stone, grooved into small, simulated squares. There was a glimpse of Tanda hurriedly wriggling her full curvedness from her brief attire as she stepped toward her dressing chest, then the secret door sealed to without even a soft sigh. Toka had his ear pressed tight to it, but it was too solidly thick, its beveled casings too finely fitted to it. And in this confining blackness, all Toka's superkeen hearing could strain from the silence was his heart's beating, his deepened breathing.

With a sense of frustration Toka knew he was now Tanda's well-jailed prisoner.

CHAPTER V

AS THE jeweled and voluptuous Tanda opened her door to Molak she was unperturbed in a clinging red negligee of diaphanous transparency. Also easily discernible was her blue knife, flatly scabbarded in red leather. Tanda questioned Molak with a languorous glance.

Molak's eyes were green drills, his voice an oily mocking. "May I come in?"

"Why not?" Tanda turned lazily toward the main table.

Hand on knife, Molak sauntered on

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to the pool at the end of Tanda's room. Glancing into its depths, he turned, strolled back, eyeing the great bed. Its coverlets were rumpled, as if from sleeping. And if he wished, he could see the floor under the bed was also innocent of anything. "I'll need some of your clothes, Tanda."

Tanda's dark eyes were amused. "What type?"

"One day set. And a negligee," he frankly admired, "like you have on now."

"Of course." Tanda took them from a drawer of her dressing chest.

Tanda a pace behind, Molak strolled to the door. Turning and holding the huge panel from closing, he gave Tanda a promising glance. "One little thing to sleep on, Tanda."

"Yes, Great Molak?" indifferently returned Tanda.

"If Roya's face and sight cannot be restored," he coolly smiled, "yours will go the way of hers."

"The Great Molak," purred Tanda, "would be unwise to act too quickly at this point in his plans."

"Oh, I shall proceed very slowly," softly promised Molak. His eyes and voice held cold hate of long standing. "If necessary, just a little searing at a time."

Tanda was amused, self-sure, mocking. "I'm sure the Great Molak will feel better after a good sleep."

"Oh, I shall be too busy to sleep just yet, Tanda." Molak quirked his thin lips. "But until I succeed or fail with Roya—pleasant dreams."

"The same, O Great Molak," bid Tanda in surface indifference. But as her door closed on her brother, Tanda's dark eyes burned her desire to know. She listened intensely against her door a moment, then opened it just wide enough to step out. She had a mission.

CHAPTER VI

AS MOLAK returned to his room, Roya still was on the lounge.

"Me, Roya," greeted Molak. "Here's your new clothes." He placed them on her lap, and she carefully identified them with her fingers.

"But my face and eyes," quietly reminded Roya. "You said you'd try healing them."

"I'm going to get the rest of the stuff now." Molak's eyes were green anticipation. "While you change."

Roya made no reply or movement as Molak strode to the door. Then with a resolute squaring of shoulders she arose, quickly shed her torn Sandcliff green and slipped swiftly into the snugging red fur briefs. As the door opened, she was tying the sandals' laces.

She turned her masked face up. "Molak?"

"Who else?" smiled Molak.

He paused till the door closed, then pressed a locking masonry. Fluffing her cascading tresses, Roya relaxed on the lounge.

Molak carefully set his armload of small white urns on the table. "Don't you like your negligee?"

Roya's voice was carefree. "I just couldn't resist the furs. I hope you don't mind too much."

"With what you got to put in them, who would mind?"

"Thank you, Molak."

"Besides, we'll enjoy the negligee a bit later." Molak sat beside her and rested one fingering hand on her smooth knee. "Feel ready, Roya?"

"What are you going to do?"

"First, you drink as many urns of Bat milk as you can hold." Molak uncapped an urn and placed it in her hands. "Okay, drink up."

Lifting her mask and carefully raising the small urn to her misshapen lips,

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Roya sipped the sparkling green liquid.

Stony against the horror of her face, Molak watched with arrogantly possessive eyes. "Taste good?"

Roya nodded.

"Drink it down."

Roya drank steadily, till the first urn was empty. Molak tossed it aside, and became passionate of evilly sharp face as he handed Roya another full urn.

"Roya," Molak intensely whispered as she steadily drank, "when my Man Bats reported your beauty to me, I couldn't believe it. I ordered them to sculpture a likeness of you. Even from that I fell in love with you! You were the most beautiful creature I'd ever seen!" Molak's long fingers pressed into Roya's slim thighs. "Roya, if you don't regain your beauty and love me, I don't want to be alive!"

A sly vixen was laughing in Roya's mellow voice. "Now I know how to kill the Great Molak."

"Eh?" stared Molak.

"I merely do not regain my beauty and sight, or remain cold to the Great Molak, and, lo, he destroys himself!"

THE cold-blooded Molak's eyes glittered approval of Roya's callous humor. "You know, you're going to be better than any yet."

"Thank you," smiled Roya, a ghoul's mouth smiling. "And I feel full of Bat milk now."

"Squeeze in one more for luck."

"The Great Molak is my doctor."

"Feel any effects yet?"

"Like I could fight ten Man Bats at once."

Molak's chuckle was of anticipation. "Too bad Sandcliff hasn't any Bat milk."

Roya remained surfacely impassive of body at the not-too-enigmatic insinuation.

"But to the pleasant tasks of the moment." Molak stepped toward his dressing chest.

"What is the next step in the treatment?" called Roya.

"Washing your face and eyes." With several sizes of clean swatches of red fur, Molak returned to the main table. He glanced around with a searching frown, then barely whispered, "Be back in a moment, Roya," and strode silently to the door.

With a swift movement he pressed the locking masonry and the door-opening triangle. The giant panel swung in, to reveal Tanda, her face an angry surprise.

Molak's face hardened with a smile. "So, sister Tanda has been listening?"

Recomposed of dark features, Tanda languored backward. "I thought it best to listen first, lest I interrupt your pleasures."

Molak stood balanced in the corridor. His cold green eyes slowly narrowed. He toyed his fancy battle knife. "So little Tanda is afraid she may interrupt me."

Tanda idled toward her door. "You wouldn't want to be, would you?"

Molak's thin lips twitched with anticipation. "Which is why I'm going to see that you don't!"

CHAPTER VII

THE impatient Toka listened vainly against the door of his tight prison. Why didn't Tanda let him out? So much time had flown. And Roya was in Molak's hands, was being—

Whiplashed by the long inaction, by the ignorance of what was happening to Roya, Toka began searching for a way out. If he could not hear into Tanda's room, then likely anyone in her room could not hear into this secret cell. Toka began tapping his fingernails methodically over the squares of the

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door, listening keenly for one false note from the solidness. Almost at once he found a hollowly echoing square, directly in front of him. Success throbbing its excitement through him, he pressed the square. But it was a solid part of the door. His hopes sagged. Yet there had to be a reason for just one square being hollow in tone. He swiftly tapped the remaining squares. All tested solid. Vainly he covered the floor, the left wall, the ceiling, the right wall. Remained the back wall. Almost at once he found a hollowly echoing square, directly in line with the door one.

Tensing with excitement of success, the uncertainty of what he might enter into, Toka pressed both squares simultaneously, felt them give ever so slightly. The door opening away from his left, Toka crouched as the black-gleaming candle-lit bedroom came into view. As the door stopped at a right angle from the wall, there was yet no sound. Keeping against the door, Toka eased out, peered around the bevel edge and toward the pool. No one. And Tanda's two wisps of red fur attire were on the floor in front of her huge dressing mirror and small bench.

Toka stepped clear of the secret door. Instantly it swung shut. Toka was to the corridor door, listening intently. Silence. He was to the unoccupied pool. Molak, considered Toka, would keep Roya in his own room, or put her in some place of imprisonment. Thus stealth, trickery, were the weapons to be used for now against Molak and his horde.

Toka set the door-locking masonry, was back to Tanda's dressing chest, was opening its drawers. He slipped off his green Sandcliff attire, squeezed into a pair of Tanda's shorts. Fortunately they were capable of stretching, as were her sandals. He tossed his Sandcliff garb into a drawer, was keenly surveying himself in the mirror. With dexterous fingers he was using Tanda's toiletry articles, was recombing his hair, was applying her make-up concoctions. With a last masterful application of a gray-white cosmetic, he simulated a mass of ugly belly scars. He then practiced Scar Belly's arrogant swagger before the mirror. The visible masquerade was perfect. But Scar Belly's voice remained. Toka tried for the throaty raspiness.

"Well, Chief, how do I look?"

"Like the stinking snake himself," approved Toka in Molak's oiliness.

. . . Except for ax and knife. Toka repressed the locking masonry, was listening intently against the door. He let it ease in an eye-sized crack, slowly let it widen, and peered quickly out. He tauted. A brilliant tiara—Tanda's—the jewels of a broken necklace, shreds of sheer red cloth, were scattered about. Tanda's wicked knife was lying halfway on up the corridor. Toka was to the weapon, picking it up, examining it. There were no blood marks, but obviously a violent fight had taken place here. An uneasiness gnawed at Toka.

Thrusting Tanda's knife from sight in his waistband, and feeling less helpless in case of a fight, he was to Molak's door, listening intently. Again nothing. He knocked with authority.

"Chief!" he imitated. "It's me! Scar Belly!"

No answer. He stood in the doorway as he caused the gigantic panel to swing into a candle-lit room that was a duplicate of Tanda's. Toka covered its human emptiness in a swift glance, noted the scores of glistening white urns on the main table, the caps and empties scattered about.

Then a deathly coldness touched him as he saw Roya's discarded iridescent green briefs and sandals of Sandcliff, saw the sheer red negligee thrown care-

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lessly on the lounge. Toka was to the empty pool, was rifling his superkeen glances around the room. No sign of secret panels. He was to the table, uncapping the torch and stepping to cleared wall areas about the room, holding the intense flame to square after square, but in vain. And if Molak should suddenly return—

Yet if Roya were supposed to be prisoner anywhere in here, wouldn't Molak have locked the door from the corridor? Not taking Molak's distinctively fancy battle-ax, lest he be instantly spotted for what he was, Toka was pausing in the massive doorway to scan the scene again. Only Hell knew where Molak had taken Roya, was doing even now to her pure loveliness!

CHAPTER VIII

HEARING Molak's exclamation of icy anger at discovering Tanda eavesdropping, Roya instantly felt her way to the closed door. A few moments later, the masked girl was twisting her hands one in another as her anguish rushed to the surface which she had so gallantly thrown over it.

"Oh, God!" she whisperingly prayed as she felt back toward the main table. "Let my face go! Let everything go! Only make me see again!"

Then she made again the valiant inner struggle to regather her surface composure. Using the table as an orienting center, she explored carefully toward the back of the room, till she felt Molak's great bed, headed against the left wall.

She was stilled by an authoritative knock on Molak's door.

"Chief!" a coarse voice called through it. "It's me! Scar Belly!"

Roya stood an irresolute moment, then swiftly knelt and crawled under Molak's bed. Feeling the floor-brushing side of the fur coverlets into concealing position, she rigidly lay there, scarcely breathing, hands tight on breast. Molak's door softly opened, then closed as quick, light footsteps entered and went to the far end of the room, paused there, swiftly returned to the vicinity of the table, apparently uncapped a leapingly chuckling torch, stepped quickly about the room, pausing frequently, returned to the table, silenced the torch, was to the door, paused a breathlessly long moment in the doorway, retreated a pace, and the door softly closed.

"Oh, God!" breathed the trembling Roya in anguished beseechment. "If only I could *see!*"

CHAPTER IX

MOLAK'S door shut as Toka whirled back into the corridor. But where to look? The balcony? He found it deserted in the bright moonlight and blue cavern glow, then was back down corridor to the door past Tanda's, was listening intently. Nothing. He knocked. No answer. No movement within. He stepped back a pace to eye the black masonries making up the massive door casings. How—

The door at the end of the corridor was sighing. Toka became Scar Belly. Molak, two large golden-yellow bowls in one arm, stopped in surprise, then was striding on up.

Molak's face had become a suspicious mask. His leanly powerful free hand was idling his fancy knife hilt. "And what are you doing back here, Scar Belly?"

Toka imitated Scar Belly's libidinous smirk. "On inspection, Chief. Had a little hunch." Molak was balanced in front of him and drilling with those implacably cold green eyes.

"Go on, Scar Belly," oilily urged

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Molak. "You came back on a hunch. Without," he softly observed, "your ax or knife."

Was Roya supposed to be in Molak's room! And where was Tanda now? Gambling, Toka furthered his ad lib alibi, "I had a hunch Tanda might be the one back of those Sandcliff ones getting in the place, Chief. So I came courting. Unarmed, naturally."

Molak's lips quirked amusedly. "And what did your love-making discover, Scar Belly?"

Toka frowned disappointedly. "Tanda wasn't in."

"Naturally, Scar Belly," softly assured Molak. "Naturally."

The implication in Molak's mocking assurance was not pleasant to contemplate, should it have been turned against Roya. "Then I knocked on your door, Chief," casually tested Toka, "but nobody answered."

M[illegible] chuckled almost amiably. "Of course."

What did the devil mean, *of course!* But Toka knew he had to get clear here before the keen-eyed Molak should detect some flaw in all this. "Well, guess I'll have to look in on a few other places, Chief."

"But be careful, Scar Belly," pointedly dismissed Molak.

"Right, Chief!"

Taut with not knowing into what he would enter, Toka stepped down corridor to the end door. As the gigantic panel, to a luxurious but unoccupied black-floored, blue-walled-and-ceilinged room, closed behind him, Toka whirled, listened intently. He heard Molak's door close, then no sound. Several taut moments Toka listened on. And still Molak did not burst out in search, as he should were Roya supposed to be in the room and was not.

Horrible uncertainties becoming fiendish devils forking his mind, the impatient Toka turned to survey this immense blue-and-black room. It was rich with tables, chairs and lounges of black stone and red fur. But Toka was to the door midway on the far wall, was listening against it. Silence. He caused the door to open, into a deserted blue-and-black foyer, meaning cooking room and entry. At the end was another door, beyond which was silence. Toka opened it, onto the large landing of a broad black stairway that flighted down left, to a pair of closed black doors which apparently gave onto the cavern floor. There were no more apparent rooms to Molak's apartment.

But back in the corridor — in the west wall, this side of the storeroom— was that masonry with the perceptible crevices around it.

TOKA was eagerly but silently there, pressing the odd masonry. In response, a heavy door segment, of human size—so apparently not made by Man Bat labor or knowledge—swung silently out from the west wall, near the main-room door. Beyond the secret segment, a human-sized passage, black of floor and blue-glowing of wall and ceiling, stretched deserted to a left turn. The secret segment closed noiselessly as Toka stepped in. Easily finding the masonry operating the segment from the passage side, he was restlessly but carefully on his way, through a maze of passages evidently used to travel to the main points of the cavern city, to even the Man Bats' side, to even the Man Bat women's most intimate quarters—to the scenes of the delicate extractions of the mysterious Bat milk. But Toka kept on his way.

Everywhere, he found secret slits for unobserved spying, found secret doors for unobtrusive entry and exit at opportune moments. He saw immense storerooms of meat and luscious fruits, care-

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fully packed in leaves; saw urns of Bat milk by the thousands; saw rooms of red-fur-and-blue-stone saddles and bridles, apparently to fit on the Man Bats' necks and shoulders and heads so that their warrior masters could ride them to battle. And Toka saw huge blue-glowing battle-axes, obviously to arm the purple gigantics. There were also storerooms of human-sized equipment; viciously waiting axes, knives and scabbards and red fur attire.

Toka discarded Tanda's tight shorts and sandals, hid them neatly in stock, found some fitting him more perfectly and authentically, likewise equipped himself with blue-glowing battle knife and double-bitted ax, then was away again, leaving no trace of himself. Along the way, he also further intently studied the Man Bats' dactylological conversations; estimated the Man Bats to be fully ten thousand adult males ready for battle, as against Sandcliff's five hundred Big Snakes of all sizes; estimated Molak's renegades to number at least two thousand, a horde licentiously hungering for Sandcliff's womanhood—womanhood trusting to Sandcliff's three thousand gallant warriors, of youths to elders. Truly, it was odds to try Sandcliff's determination.

Toka appeared openly at several places, and was unsuspected as he practiced his acquisition of Man Bat finger language. But the purple monsters were barren of information about any prison. The results were the same with the renegades he approached.

At one place Toka stepped onto the colossal black stage of a vast blue-domed auditorium that was deserted throughout its rows upon rows of huge black stone seats. Toka looked up at the illustration now on stage. And stood in wordless amazement. Built onto a gigantic sheet of black stone, that reached from stage floor up into the flies and from wing to wing, was a three-dimensional scale reproduction of a great cliffed city and surrounding areas as viewed from the air. Inset in white on the cliff city's south base was its name, SANDCLIFF. It was home—familiar to Toka as his hand.

ON THE north shoulder of the flower-rich valley of green jungle that ran east to west through a predominantly red desolation, the fiery crimson stone mass of Sandcliff rose sheer on east and west sides and north back, to become loftily tri-peaked of jaggedly rocked Topland. Sandcliff's south, stepped face of twenty-five white-awninged terraces was minutely detailed, even the parquetry of terrace floor and exquisitely scening of back wall. There were each terrace's one hundred deeply casinged black stone doors, each to an apartment. There were terrace Twenty-four's middle group of ten great black doors that led to Sandcliff's court, and the east pair of great doors that led to Sandcliff's workshop, and the west pair that gave into its storeroom.

Yet, grimly hoped Toka, the spying Man Bats and their masters were apparently ignorant of what lay behind many of Sandcliff's doors.

But he saw that Sandcliff's intense training of its Big Snakes herd, on the endless red flatlands west of the huge white cliff, on the south side of the valley, had been quite accurately modeled. The great dinosaurs, large and small colossals of every reptilian hue and structure, were portrayed as they performed their patently innocent precision parading, drilling and acrobatics under Sandcliff warriors' directions.

And also shown was each noonday's feverishly efficient digging of the miracle water berries from the black ooze shore of the Hop, that mysterious oval

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of blue water set midway between Sandcliff and the Big Brown, the great river snaking down through the valley. Yet, again, it was unlikely the Man Bats and their masters knew of the water berries' uses. But what would they care anyway; they had that mysterious, miraculous Bat milk. Toka had to admit the fluid at least *seemed* fully equal to Sandcliff's fruit.

But back to the giant model. The visible outer character of Sandcliff itself was most minutely detailed: the two systems of balustraded stairways that zigzaggedly tri-sected it from terrace Twenty-five to One; the six willow ladders down the sheer, high base from terrace One to the grassy clearings below; the six boom-and-winch operated green-willow elevator cages that ran from the clearings to terrace One; and the six more cages that provided inter-terrace transportation between terace One and Twenty-five, these latters' twin booms and winches being recessed in the wall above Twenty-five. Even Sandcliff's herds of long-wooled goats, which roamed its Topland, had been modeled; and the low red buildings there, where the goats were processed. And of course had also been reproduced, in inanimate miniature, Sandcliff's breathlessly beautiful women and lithely tawny men and children, every one so truly accurate of feature and form as to be instantly recognized; but all marked for a ruthless proving of Molak's lust and war power.

Toka shot his glance into the wings and backstage area here. Waiting for the model of Sandcliff to be slid off and one or other of themselves slid on stage, were more gigantic sheets of black stone, on which problems in aerial maneuver and combat training, or instructions for the manufacturing of the various products for battle, were chalked or modeled in colored clay.

This, with all that Toka had seen, added up to a very sobering testimonial to the diabolical thoroughness of Molak's black scheming. It made Sandcliff's precautionary readying appear doubtful by comparison.

But Roya! She was not here either! And how many secret rooms and passages did this evil underground community have? How many had he overlooked? There was no time to test everywhere for secret masonries!

CHAPTER X

ROYA lay under Molak's bed a few more long moments, till the door again opened. Roya tauted. Arrogant steps possessively entered, then stopped short as the door closed.

"Roya!" puzzledly demanded Molak's sharp voice.

Roya hesitated, then carefully rolled from under the bed.

As Molak stepped toward the table, there to put down the golden-yellow bowls and stride on toward Roya, he smiled quizzical amusement. "Why *under* the bed?"

"Oh, I wasn't sleeping," lightly assured Roya as Molak helped her toward the main table. "When Scar Belly knocked and shouted for you, I just hid."

Molak pondered Roya, languoring so carefree and trustingly before him. "You're a queer one, Roya."

"Isn't everyone different?"

"But you're so clean, so completely unafraid. You're like a distant star a man would fight through Hell for, but wouldn't want to hurt, wouldn't want to soil."

"Thank you, Molak." Roya's voice kept secret any triumph—at least momentary triumph—of her character over Molak's lust.

He frowned. "I guess I sound

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crazy." He shrugged. "But to heal that face."

"What do we do now, Molak?"

"I have two large bowls here." Molak cleared a space on the nearby table and placed one bowl handy. "We'll fill one with Bat milk. Using small fur swatches, you'll soak your face and eyes; you can gauge the pressure better yourself."

Roya felt the bowl into which Molak was emptying urn after urn of Bat milk.

"Better take off that mask and do back your hair."

As Roya expertly obeyed, Molak again became stony against her sightless horror.

The large bowl full near to the brim, Molak handed Roya one of the swatches. Stooping over the bowl, she began dipping the bit of fur into the green liquid, then pressing the dripping swatch to her ghastly face, holding back her eyelids and pressing the swatch to her blobs of eyeballs. And slowly, the bowl of milk turned from a clear, sparkling green to a thick, scummy yellow. And slowly—miraculously—Roya's unspeakableness of feature gave way for her former flawless loveliness, for her blushed-rose radiance of creamy tan complexion, for her perfect lips and nose, for her slender, lilting brows, her long, golden eyelashes.

Molak's voice was barely too taut. "How's it feel?"

"Healing." Roya was trembling with expectancy, with the facial news her fingers had relayed to her. "Only I can't see—yet."

As he handed Roya a large swatch, Molak's assured manner was one of treatment proceeding satisfactorily. "Dry your hands and face—but don't touch your eyes."

Doing as prescribed, Roya stood patiently beside the table.

Molak poured an urn of Bat milk over his hands, then stepped close in front of her. "Turn your face up to me."

With thumbs and forefingers, Molak carefully drew back her lids. His thin lips quirked; his lean jaw muscles set; his green eyes became colder, harder.

A smooth gray-white heavy film now covered Roya's eyeballs; no pupils were even faintly visible.

"See any light?" casually tested Molak.

Roya's restored lips trembled. But her "no" was steady.

Molak took his fingers away. Thoughtfully considering Roya a moment, he shrugged, smiled sardonically, and began puffing out the candelabras.

"Why are you doing that?" quietly puzzled Roya.

"Little too bright in here now."

CHAPTER XI

HIS mind a turmoil of fears and discoveries, Toka feverishly retraced the maze of secret passages to the corridor of Molak's apartment. First investigating the storeroom to make sure it was uninhabited, he listened against the door directly across corridor. His heart skipped, then raced with hope as he heard a soft movement within.

Quickly he pressed the blue triangle in the massive casing, to no avail. Leaning ax against wall, he once more raced his hands and fingers in search of the combination unlocking this door, again could not find it. He listened intently. There were footsteps within now—light and feminine. Railing at his illogical searchings through those passages, he risked a light tapping of his fingernails against the door, listened for response. The footsteps within approached the door. Toka tapped three times again. Three soft taps replied from the other side.

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Twice he circled through the forest about the bat city

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Roya should still remember the Sandcliff code. Toka softly tapped, "Are you all right?"

His heart grew cold as came this cavern's drum and blinker code, "Can't understand."

Toka tapped the cavern code. "Tanda?"

"Yes. You?"

"Toka. Open up."

"Molak threw me in and locked the door."

"Where's Roya?"

"Open the door!"

"Is Roya in there too?"

"No!" irately tapped Tanda. "Get me out of this makeshift mausoleum!"

"Can't find combination!"

Tanda began swiftly tapping directions.

Toka pressed the sequence of casing masonries that should have unlocked the door. But evidently Molak had more than one combination.

"Toka!" anxiously tapped Tanda.

"Tried everything," tapped Toka. "Keep quiet. I'll be back."

He stole swiftly up to Tanda's room. It was precisely as he'd left it. He stepped to Molak's door, listened intently. All the life seemed to drop out of him. It could not be! Roya could not be like that! Yet, considering what Molak had evidently accomplished with her—

CHAPTER XII

ROYA stood surfacely relaxed beside the table as Molak strode about the great room to snuff out all but one small candle on the table beside his bed. And beyond this frail, lone yellow radiance, huge, grotesque shadows became gleefully wavering ghouls, straining to swarm from out the vast black room's forbidding gloom.

"Just what is the next treatment?" evenly insisted Roya as Molak took her arm.

Molak was amused. "Compresses of Bat milk, pressed onto your eyeballs. What did you think?"

Roya allowed Molak to guide her to his great bed and help her lie supine on its soft furriness. Returning through the wavering gloom to the main table, Molak filled the second bowl with Bat milk. Coming back with it and several full urns and the remaining clean swatches of fur, he placed all on the small table by the bed.

"And now for this treatment." His face was an expressionless mask, accented by shadow and faint candlelight.

Only Roya's clenched hands at her sides revealed her emotion. Taking keen battle knife, pouring an urn of Bat milk over it and his hands, Molak cut out two tiny ovals of fur and dropped them into the bowl of milk. Fishing one swatch from the liquid, and carefully opening Roya's left eyelids with his free fingers, he gently pressed the tiny compress to her eyeball. Holding it in place with free fingers, he took up and dipped a large oval swatch and laid it firmly atop the first, covered the entire eye area from brow to nose to cheek.

"Hold it in place," instructed Molak.

Roya held it firm with her left fingers as Molak repeated the careful process on her right eye. Roya holding both sets of dressings in place, Molak formed a narrow bandage of fur. As he placed it down across her eye dressings, Roya carefully withdrew her fingers, raised her head, and Molak tied the ends into a flat knot.

"How long," evenly wondered Roya, "before we know?"

"It all depends." The noncommittal Molak dried his hands on a swatch.

In the brooding, eerie shadows and

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frailly flickering candle-glow, Roya lay unaware of Molak's thoughtful eyeing of her striking beauty of restored feature, his visual caressing of her clean lines of creamy tan feminine form.

"What if I don't see again?" suddenly tested Roya in quiet tone.

"It restored your face."

"But what if it doesn't restore my sight?"

Sitting beside her, Molak took her hands caressingly into his. "If Bat milk can't make you see, nothing can."

"But what if it doesn't?"

She obliquely but clearly received the cruel answer to her searching. "Think of seeing!" impatiently snapped Molak. "Not of not seeing!" And for long moments he narrowly considered Roya's bandaged eyes, then stood up and paced with tawny strides about the bed, one hand toying his knife hilt, his other caressing his chin, his eyes lingering again and again over Roya.

She lay quiet, did not break the brooding, impatient silence.

Molak finally sat on the bed beside her. His face was set, his voice icy with self-discipline. "How's the eyes feel?"

With tense restraint, Roya reported, "Almost as if I could see."

MOLAK fumbled at the bandage, laid it off. Standing so his shadow, cast grotesquely huge and quivering by the tiny candle, fell blackly across Roya's face, he cupped one hand over her left eye as with his other fingers he gently removed the compress.

"Close your eyelid."

Leaning to the candle, Molak examined the tiny fur oval that had been next to the eyeball. A gray-white skim adhered to it. Molak tossed it away, repeated the removing process on Roya's right eye. The second tiny compress also held a gray-white skim. Sharply arrogant features taut, Molak took up the candle and let the frail illumination dance across Roya's eyelids.

Roya tensed. Her restored features jerked. Her voice trembled in joyful discovery. "I can see light through my eyelids!"

Molak slowly relaxed and smiled his swiftly returning ego. "Slowly—open them."

Roya did so, and the yellow candlelight clearly revealed pure white eyeballs that were again centered with large iris and pupils of the deepest and clearest blue, in which Molak's image was reflected in perfect miniature.

"Molak!" gasped Roya. "Oh, Molak, I can see. I can see again!" She sat up abruptly. In joy of refound sight she danced her glances around the eerily shadowed vast room.

Molak sat and watched her with savoring approval and enjoyment.

"The candles!" Roya bounced herself from the bed, snatched the candle from Molak and ran to view herself in the huge mirror. "Let's light them all—and see . . . see!" Lighting the nearby candelabras, she stood in front of Molak's dressing mirror, happily admired herself as she unpinned her blondeness and shook it into shimmering waves about her creamy tan nudity of shoulders. She was restored to her former beauty—as proved by this exquisitely, but embarrassingly, life-like sculpture of herself, standing here beside Molak's dressing chest.

The many candelabras all glowing their clusters of tongues, the great black-gleaming room yellowly brilliant, the evilly handsome Molak stood looking down at Roya. "Light hurt?"

"Not a bit."

"See all right?"

"Perfectly." Roya looked up and met his devouring eyes. "I'll never be

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able to thank you, Molak."

MOLAK possessed her lightly in his leanly muscular arms. "It's enough that you're flawless and mine now." He gazed over her head and into the futre, and reveled, "Together we'll rule the world!" His cold green eyes glittered with conquest.

"But do you know that Sandcliff is mysteriously strong?" quietly warned Roya. "Well prepared?"

Holding her by her shoulders, Molak eyed her with amused condescension. "My two thousand warriors," he egotistically enumerated. "Commanding my thousands of adult Man Bats against Sandcliff's three thousand surprised warriors. And when what's left of Sandcliff is exhausted from fighting my armed Man Bats, my warriors and I—superstrong with Bat milk—come in and take what we want!" Molak chuckled at this first of many easy, gory triumphs in prospect.

But Roya frowned away.

Molak held her square by the shoulders. "What's wrong?"

"Sandcliff has made something ready for just such an attack."

"What kind of thing?" Molak's lean fingers vised into the nakedness of Royas' shoulders.

" I don't know," winced Roya. "Before I was captured, a secret meeting was held by a high few in the court."

Letting her go, Molak frowned in consideration, then smiled thin anticipation. "The Princely commander of Sandcliff's battle forces will be made to tell what he surely must know of this secret thing you mention."

"Toka foolishly came after me before he could be told." Amused disdain for Toka was in Roya's voice and on her face as she leaned back on the table and rubbed where Molak's fingers had bruised her shoulders. "So how can the idiot possibly tell if even he doesn't know what the elders did?" She sneered. "Likely he'd tell lie after lie to avoid your persuasions."

Molak began pacing, hard-faced in thought, fist on hip, one hand stroking sharp chin. The painful memories of his failure in Nykola were on him. "I don't see what the unsuspecting fools could possibly do to stop me now."

Roya idly fingered the urns on the table. Then, in helpful longing, she looked up at Molak. "Would you like to know, Molak?"

"Of course!" he snapped.

"You can."

Molak paused, wide-legged, and narrowly eyed the unwaveringly eyed Roya. "How?"

"Me."

"Yes?"

"I could fly back tonight, learn the secret from the suspectible elders, and return to you with it."

Molak chuckled sardonically.

"So now the Great Molak doesn't trust me," quietly reflected Roya with hurt expression. "After he's given me beauty and sight, and love."

Obviously feeling those barbs, Molak challenged, "Weren't you in love with that Sandcliff idiot?"

Roya was wry, bitter. "Who alone helped me when I was horrible and blind—who on Sandcliff would want me were I sightless and so ugly I had to wear a mask?" She smiled softly in humble gratitude. "You've proved your love for me, Molak."

He obviously wavered as he narrowly eyed her.

Roya shrugged and smiled philosophically and amusedly. "We might as well be realistic too, Molak. If I tricked you now, what could I possibly gain but death? I know you'll destroy Sandcliff anyway. The only thing is, before Sandcliff went down, its secret

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defense measures might destroy so many of your Man Bats and warriors that you could not attack your main goal, Nykola, for years. And in that time, who knows what Nykola might suspect, what miraculous new defenses it might develop against anyone of your intent?"

Molak's cold green eyes were admiring, his thin lips quirking an approving smile. "Not only beauty beyond pale, but brains—brains to match even mine!"

"Thank you, Molak," softly accepted Roya.

The firest of conquest were driving Molak now. "I'll have a Man Bat saddled for Sandcliff at once!" He uncapped two urns of Bat milk, gave one to Roya. "To our rule!"

Roya smiled, and toasted, "To your rule!"

Molak beamed approval, and touching urns, they drank down the sparkling green liquid.

"I'll change back into my Sandcliff green, so I won't be suspected by my welcoming Sandcliffians, while you ready the Man Bat," decided Roya.

"Good!" Molak took up his battle-ax and strode for the door.

CHAPTER VIII

"INTERESTING listening?" purred a rippling throatiness just behind Toka as he listened against Molak's door.

Battle-ax swinging to flash, Toka whirled, to behold a violently disheveled but plainly uninjured and still well bejeweled Tanda. She was inadequately holding her inadequate shreds of sheer red negligee together with one hand. A glance beyond her showed the door to her prison closed.

Toka kept his eyes from Tanda's revealed physical appeal, and quietly demanded, "How'd you get out?"

"Held the torch around the door and casings until the heat warped the locking mechanism."

Toka shifted uncomfortably as the carelessly voluptuous creature came close and listened against Molak's door.

"Well," she softly purred with lifted eyebrow. "No wonder you didn't hear me escaping."

Toka glanced uneasily up and down the giant corridor.

Whispering, "Come, my Toka," Tanda stepped across into her room.

Still mentally floundering from Roya's unrestrained acceptance of Molak, Toka followed. As he lounged listeningly against the massive casing and door, Tanda languished likewise close in front of him.

"You escaped from my secret chamber," she observed.

"Found the combination." Toka heard Molak come out and stride up corridor to the balcony.

"You're armed and dressed in cavern warrior attire," pointed Tanda.

"Went sight-seeing. Took what I needed."

"Your disguise," approved Tanda, "a perfect resemblance of Scar Belly."

Listening to Royas betrayal to Molak had even made Toka forget his masquerade. He grinned wryly. "Yeah. Even fooled the Great Molak." That devil returned and entered his room. A moment, and he and Roya came out and, with intimately low laughter and scheming, went strolling up corridor for the balcony.

"Come, my Toka," warmly whispered Tanda. "Let's forget about Molak and all this for now."

Tanda's dark eyes were afire with the hungry light. But Toka felt no response. Deep within him a cold anger was rising and swelling to scourge away all personal hurt from Royas rejection

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of his love, her rejection of moral principles resting on those holding high positions over others. Toka suddenly realized Tanda had stood eyeing him keenly.

"Those were grim thoughts for some one, my Toka."

He hoped his feature were a wryly smiling mask. "Just waking up to what a sucker I've been played for." He saw Tanda accept it.

MOLAK was strolling back down the corridor. So the traitoress, Roya, was off for Sandcliff. Molak sauntered on past, to the door of the room wherein Toka and Tanda had been prisoner—were supposed to be imprisoned still.

Tanda became intent against her door. Toka kept his eyes from her hanging wisps of attire and waited. Molak's angry strides burst out of the prison room, closed toward Tanda's door. Tanda was moving swiftly away as Toka was silently to the clear forecenter of the room and poising with battle-ax swinging to flash and impatient fighter being roaring for action; might as well take on Molak here and now and destroy one of the brains of this evil. Tanda had her secret door open, was gesturing impatiently as Molak's battle-ax began whaling the corridor door.

"Open up!" whiplashed Molak in cold rage. "Or I'll smash this door in!"

Tanda was hissing in Toka's ear. "Don't be a fool! He's soaked in Bat milk! Even you couldn't kill him quick enough now—he's too ready! The whole place would hear and be on us in an instant—we'd lose everything!"

His intelligence regaining command of his battle emotions, Toka allowed the logical Tanda to push him for her secret chamber. Molak's battle-ax was flailing angry blows, rattling the giant corridor door in its massive casings.

"All right, all right, Molak The Madman!" leisurely called Tanda as her secret door closed on Toka.

Molak's battle-ax quieted. Tanda sauntered to the corridor door, released the locking masonry. Molak slammed the huge panel wide and stepped in with great blue battle-ax swinging ready. He swiftly searched the room, drilled his icy glittering green eyes into Tanda's insolent ones. Careless of her hanging shreds, she stood languorously behind a small chair, her hands resting on its back.

Molak's voice was low and hard with imperial impatience. "Where's that Sandcliff fool?"

"Don't you know either?" mocked Tanda.

"I put you in there with him!" He's not in there now either!" Molak was slowly penduluming his wicked battle-ax as he drilled Tanda with his eyes.

"You, of course, made sure he was in there when you so impatiently put me in?"

Tanda's sarcastic politeness bit home, and Molak tauted with mental confusion. "How'd you get out of that room!"

Tanda smiled amusedly. "Did the Great Molak ever try the inside of those door casings?"

Molak toyed his knife, swung his battle-ax warningly. "There are ways to handle lying tongues!"

Tanda was surfacely unafraid, except for gripping the back of the chair. "That couldn't mean," she smiled, "that the Great Molak is just realizing how smart his little blonde plaything is?"

Molak tensed with anger.

"Oh, do pardon me," quickly apologized Tanda in mock humility. "I see the Great Molak feels no chagrin whatever at the smooth way he's been tricked."

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Molak's voice was a whipcrack. "Nobody tricked me!"

"She's going back to join her Sandcliff Prince, isn't she?"

"She's going back to Sandcliff to spy for me! To find out what their secret defense plans are!"

Throwing back her dark head, Tanda ripped peals of derisive laughter.

Molak stood in the mid forecenter of the room, anger darkening his scowling, bewildered, outraged features. "She'll come back!" he promised in deadly coldness. He emphasized each word, "She will come back!" Whirling, possessed by a driving, seething, consuming rage of determination, he was gone.

CHAPTER XIV

THE heavy panel of the pit-black secret chamber suddenly moved under Toka's waiting hand. Already taut with waiting for Tanda to get rid of Molak, he balanced for battle. But only the fully rejeweled Tanda, hair neatened, make-up renewed, and her voluptuous physicalness becoming through a fresh red negligee of provocative sheerness, was smiling at him as his eyes searched hers.

"You may come out now, my Toka," she softly offered, "and we'll have fun."

"And the Great Molak?"

"The Great Molak now has other things to divert his mind."

Tanda's feminine scenting rushed into Toka's sensitive nostrils, began stimulating his maleness. But whipped by the peril of trusting Sandcliff, his being strained to be out of this room and on his way to work.

"Our immediate business before our leisurely pleasures, my darling," quipped Toka, and strode unstoppably for the corridor door.

The disappointed Tanda followed close. "What business?"

"Suppying Molak with more diversions."

Tanda was amusedly sardonic. "And also save Sandcliff."

Toka hoped his soft chuckle ridiculed her suspicions. "What is Sandcliff compared to the whole world? But naturally, why destroy what we can have for our slaves?" He laughed mentally as he saw Tanda swallow what he was telling her.

Her eyes narrowed with a cold consideration. Her lips curled approval. "Much better than Molak's way. Much better."

"All right, then," ordered Toka. "No matter what happens, stay in this room. If necessary, get into your secret chamber. But stay clear of the party."

"But I don't want to miss the fun!" protested Tanda.

"And I don't want you to lose that smart little head," intimately countered Toka as he detected the corridor silent.

Depending on his Scar Belly disguise, and Tanda's necessity of remaining quiet, Toka stepped boldly into the corridor. He listened against Tanda's door, heard her set the locking masonry and step back to the door, evidently to listen. Toka smiled thin satisfaction; he wouldn't kill her—yet. Stepping over to Molak's door, Toka listened intently. Nothing. He tapped his fingers on the door. No answer, and the immense black room, yellowly candlelit, was deserted. At the balcony door, Toka heard only the drum of routine orders, the occasionally shouted exchanges of warriors down on the landing ledge. Bedeviled by the uncertainty of Molak's whereabouts, the probability of too-suddenly encountering Scar Belly, Toka eased the door open.

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THE balcony was deserted in the morning brilliance. The sky was woven with flights of Man Bats, taking off, practicing combat maneuvers, performing expertly, training to a fine edge with mock attacks and counter-attacks. Many of the purple gigantics were bridled of head and saddled of neck and shoulders, and were carrying graceful warrior riders. But none of these latter was Molak or Scar Belly.

Casually, so as to arouse no suspicion, Toka idled toward the fore parapet. The Man Bat and warrior operating the huge main blinker disk and the large red drum out below the balcony looked up.

With a frown he hoped was one of important anxiety, Toka called down to the signal warrior. "Where's the Chief?"

"Took off as I came on duty at dawn, Scar Belly."

Toka was surfacely casual. "Where to?"

The warrior shrugged. "Just streaked hell-bent into the northeast. Looked fit to chew his battle-ax."

Toka nodded as if he understood, and the signal warrior turned back to his duty. Toka stepped away to the cavern-side parapet and glanced back into the bustling cavern. He saw Scar Belly and Loose Lip and a group of Man Bats hurrying for mid-ledge. Toka glanced into the northwest, saw two v's of purple specks, riderless, streaking this way. A spy flight, to report. Toka turned, stepped casually to the corridor door, stepped in, held the door open an eye-sized crack, and waited.

Just over the cavern-side parapet Toka could clearly glimpse the great landing ledge from midsection on east. He saw Loose Lip and Scar Belly stride out and meet the incoming spy flight. He easily read the Man Bat's dactylological, "Nothing new on Sandcliff. No outward sign of any alarm over the capture of their Prince or Princess." Loose Lip and Scar Belly dismissed the arrivals and sent off the new spy flight, then Loose Lip strode straight on into the cavern as Scar Belly angled in toward Molak's apartment's stair, evidently to report. Toka hurried down corridor.

In Molak's room, he stood against the massive casing to the hinged right of the door and rested his battle-ax near his right hand. Drawing his long-bladed battle knife into right hand, he waited. His fighter being tauted tighter and tighter, his anger grew colder and implacably colder. Footsteps—Scar Belly's only—finally hurried up corridor. The renegade's fist hammered Molak's door. Toka concentrated on Molak's whiplash command.

"Chief!" called Scar Belly as his fist impatiently hammered the door again. "It's me! Scar Belly!"

"Come in!" bid Toka.

He poised, and gripped his knife as the huge door swung in toward his left. Scar Belly was obviously waiting in the deep doorway. Had the imitation of Molak's voice been too obvious? Toka strained mentally to assure Scar Belly, to bid him enter. He half-crouched as Scar Belly hesitantly stepped in two paces. The huge door began swinging shut. Scar Belly's powerful back was to Toka. His sleek-haired head was turning with puzzlement. Toka leaped.

SCAR BELLY glimpsed him from the corner of his narrowly darting eye, leaped his battle-ax in a vicious backhand. Toka slammed against Scar Belly's back and blocked the driving ax by taking the handle resoundingly on his right thigh as he shot his left arm under Scar Belly's chin and

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wrenched viciously in a strangle hold as his knife glittered hilt-deep into Scar Belly's left chest. The renegade's body convulsed in Toka's vising embrace and the battle-ax clunked to the floor. The once-powerful legs trembled and bucked abruptly. A rattle came in the corded throat straining under Toka's strangling arm and Scar Belly hung limp.

The killing, detachedly considered Toka as he booted the body under Molak's bed, had been quick. And pausing in the doorway and glancing back into the room, he saw no sign of any murder. Murder? mused Toka as he stepped up corridor. He felt only a sense of regret that some men, inexplicably, were evidently created to be eternally foul.

Toka found the balcony yet deserted, saw no sign of Molak's returning. Back in the corridor, he listened at Tanda's door. She was humming happily as she lazily splashed about in her pool. Cooperating so far, mused Toka. But for how much longer?

Battle-ax ready for swift butchery, Toka strode through the foyer. Two Man Bat boys were busy at preparing aromatic and eye-delighting foods. They glanced up, evidently took him to be Scar Belly, looked down again and went on about their work. On the landing of the broad stairs leading down to the cavern floor, Toka paused, counted to ten as he listened against the foyer door. The servants made no move of suspecting anything. Toka reentered the foyer. The boys merely glanced up as he strode into the main room. Toka whirled, listened at the closed door. The Man Bats kept on working. Toka felt he had established his familiarity with the boys for future use. He was then into the corridor, into the secret passages, now familiar to him by previous searchings.

Finding the cavernous auditorium silent row upon row; Toka stepped onto the proscenium, stood looking up at the model. Sandcliff had removed all its awnings, cleared its terraces, as if in general housecleaning; otherwise no outward revelations. Toka smiled thin amusement at the efficiency of Sandcliff's camouflage. Then he was swinging his battle-ax, leaping up and hurling it to the heights he could not otherwise reach. And the stage was strewn with varicolored blobs of clay, the gigantic black sheet of stone left holding nothing but useless smears of it.

Toka found the balcony still deserted. Man Bats and warrior riders threated far overheard and low about, landing and taking off. A keen searching of the sky from west to east revealed no sign of Molak. A glance back into the bustling cavern was likewise without information.

The Mad Molak's inexplicable action was a disturbing barb in Toka's considerations. As well it might.

CHAPTER XV

LOW over the night-shrouded northeast flatlands streaked a tremendously powerful Man Bat, a giant of the purple gigantics. Its rider was Molak. His blue battle-ax was thonged to pommel of the rosette-studdied saddle. His green eyes, narrowed against the sea of air, glittered coldly. Though the air was already shrilling high protest at this violent passage through it, Molak again and again cracked the long excess of fancily set reins to the Man Bat's tri-ridged skull, and the creature's enormous spread of purple membranes rippled yet swifter and swifter.

The gray belt of dawn was growing in the east as Molak shot over a broad jungled valley and banked his mount

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sharply, to circle tightly and low. From east to west through the verdant valley a brown river snaked wide and roiling. The brightening gray east tinted to pink and deepened towards crimson. The night faded swiftly into the flat west, and the fiery sun edged up and rose free in the east, burned goldenly across the vast, predominantly red desolation. As the sun soared into the blue, Molak kept pace.

Quarter way up the morning, the western flatness was broken by a notch into which the valley converged with distance. The south shoulder of the notch was a softly white-glowing cliff, pinnacled and jagged. The north shoulder was a tri-peaked upthrusting of stone that was fiery red in the rays of the burning sun. Over and about the notch, a half dozen riderless purple specks swooped and soared. Always between this far distant red cliff and the soaring sun Molak kept his Man Bat tightly circling.

The altitude became so tremendous that Molak's and his Man Bat's breathing quickened and deepened. And far west and far below was spread out, as on a three-dimensional map viewed from an angle, the red, terraced cliff and surrounding terrain, and six winging Man Bats. From ornate terrace to terrace, via two zig-zagging stairway systems and twelve large elevator cages, humans clad in iridescent green briefs purposely hurried and transported materials and equipment. All the men were armed with black battle knives and battle-axes, the later weapons double-headed, one head broad of superkeen blade, the opposite head wide and wickedly knobbed. All terrace awnings had also been removed, the broad structures cleared of all lounging furniture or other obstacles. Out on the immense flatlands south and west from the white cliff, great dinosaurs of every nightmarish form and coloring were lightly exercising, under human command.

But Molak's superkeen eyes glittered expectantly on the red cliff, the top terrace, the aloof east end. Yet, in the blinding fire of the sun, Molak himself could not be detected by any of the constantly searching eye, human or Man Bat, down there.

Slowly, to midmorning and east above the red cliff, rode the set-faced Molak and the sun. The human and cliff shadows far below pointed stubbily straight northwest. And the spying Man Bats formed two v's far below, streaked around in a great circle and swept for the southeast, disappeared below the horizon. And obviously the tiny humans believed themselves now unwatched. From an apartment doorway on the very east end of the top terrace a blonde girl clad in the standard green briefs, but wearing her emerald bracelet of royal lineage, stepped and strolled to the balustrade, stood alone and brooded into the southeast. Molak instantly nosed his Man Bat over, whipped it into a power dive, leaned back in the saddle, stood back in stirrups. The air began whining higher and swiftly higher in shrill protest.

CLOSER and closer spread the terrain. Down, on down and straight in line from sun to cliff streaked Molok, was now to five thousand paces. Another split moment and he was to four thousand, three, two. Yet no warning. Yet the girl brooded alone by the balustrade.

It was the high screaming of the protesting air that attracted attention. Several lookouts scanned the overhead with anxious, drawn faces; were only blinded by the sun.

To five hundred paces in a split mo-

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ment air-howled Molak, for the east end of the top terrace. The angle of sight cleared the sun; the centermost peak's lookouts saw.

"Enemy from sun for east twenty-five!" frantically staccatoed the Needle Peak drum.

The hurrying populace on Sandcliff paused, stared up. Thousands saw the plummeting Man Bat and rider, were startled, but deducted the foul intent, yelled. Recalled from brooding, Roya jerked a white, worried face up, was blinded by the sun. In response to the frantic shouting of desperate warriors racing toward her, she whirled bewilderedly for the door behind her.

The shrill howling of bodies in terrific flight screamed higher and closer. Molak was swerving his Man Bat in a windscreaming turn and pull-out, was leaning over and down to his right, his powerfully muscled right arm extending, his long fingers reaching. Swarms of the racing warriors were hurling their battle knives in savage desperation. Dozens of blades glittered black viciousness in the sunlight, but at most only slit harmlessly into the great Man Bat's adroitly parrying wings and were flipped free, the wounds instantly closing.

Roya was at her door, the black panel beginning to open in. Her face was stark over her right shoulder. The sneering Molak wind-screamed closer to spread a great winged shadow over the girl and the terrace end. Molak strained more, snapped his grasping fingers into Roya's blonde hair and spun his Man Bat clear of the terrace. And the anguished warriors now dared not hurl more knives, even though Roya's scream slit the angry yell-veined air as Molak pulled her fighting into his powerful embrace. Around and straight from Sandcliff air-screamed Man Bat and riders, shot over the jungled valley, were over the red flatlands and speeding away into the flat southeast.

The triumphant Molak set his racing Man Bat on a direct course, then looped the reins to pommel and easily fought Roya in front of him.

"Don't want to come back, eh!" he mocked above the high-pitched screaming of the air.

"Why did you have to spoil everything by doing this?" demanded Roya in a good display of high anger.

Molak was unmoved, gave a short, silent laugh. "Wait'll you see what I'm going to do!"

Roya's struggles increased in franticness. The gigantic Man Bat wobbled slightly from the foully intimate combatting. Molak sat his saddle firm and wrestled Roya fondingly. Her lovely features were working with fear and anger, her eyes blazing into Molak's. Her left hand fought free, cracked against his mocking face. He only chuckled enjoyment, fought his embrace dishevelingly tighter, held her arms helpless. The wind whipped her shoulder-long blondeness about her features as she fantically strained her face back and away. Molak's lusting mouth pursued closer, working aside her interfering hair. And the gasping girl laxed into blessed unconsciousness.

Molak frowned down at her with disappointment, then shrugged, chuckled oilly. Holding his awryly clad prize across his saddle and thighs, he whipped his Man Bat to even higher screaming speed.

CHAPTER XVI

BUT Molak away, decided Toka, was not an inopportune time for the entertainment to begin. He caught the yellow eye of the Man Bat at the blinker disk below the balcony, and

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dactylated, "Order my mount readied and waiting below the balcony here!"

"At once, Commander Scar Belly!" The winged gigantic revolved the blinker in toward the east side of the cavern, and flashed, "Commander Scar Belly's mount, report below balcony!"

Toka turned down the corridor. At Tanda's door, he listened; her happy humming was coming softly from the vicinity of her dressing chest and mirror. Toka stepped on down corridor. In the foyer, the two Man Bat boys were still busy with food preparations, were evidently readying to serve a banquet upon the Great Molak's return. Toka wondered at the boys' possible reactions to his plan. But were these not the ones Tanda had sent to capture Roya? Were they not in league with the scheming Tanda and therefore also desirous of remaining in Molak's good graces?

Toka frowned a smile. The boys smiled their green lips too automatically. Wary wonder was in their yellow eyes. Toka idled, surfacely indecisive. The boys obviously conjectured as they deftly worked.

Toka abruptly dactylated, "Would you have time to straighten up a room before the Great Molak returns?"

"The Great Molak is not here."

"On a little flight," casually tested Toka. "Into the northeast."

The boys, too, were obviously ignorant of Molak's reasons and goal.

"Even now he may be returning." Toka fought down his consuming impatience, and insinuated, "He left in anger."

The boys instantly set their cookery preparations carefully aside. "The room to be straightened up, Commander Scar Belly?"

"The one this side of Tanda's."

The green-lipped and arch-nosed purple features twitched ever so perceptibly with curiosity. "But it is always locked, Commander Scar Belly."

"Not any more."

"We go at once, Commander Scar Belly." Trying not to appear eager, the boys strode toward the main room as Toka made to stride the opposite way, for the entry stairs.

The main room door was closing. Instantly Toka was back the length of the foyer, listening. The boys' bare footsteps hurried into the corridor. Toka was across the luxurious main room and listening against the corridor door. The boys' bare feet hesitantly entered the prison room. Toka was swiftly up corridor to the balcony door. Casually, he stepped out, noted the sky yet clear of any returning Molak. He lounged against the deep casing and corridor door, surfacely lazy but intently listening.

Suppose they didn't—

Toka tensed under his surface of laziness as a room door sighed. Two sets of bare feet paused, then were hurrying down corridor. Toka strode easily for the fore parapet. A powerful Man Bat, saddled and bridled, was waiting below.

"Mount me!" dactylated Toka.

INSTANTLY the purple monster reached up, lifted Toka down to saddle. No one paid him more than cursory attention as he sat the creature easily and guided it toward the center of the immense ledge. There, from the vantage of the Man Bat's broad shoulders, he could see over the hustling traffic in the great blue cavern. Molak's —or Tanda's—two servants were hurrying for the Man Bat side, their facial expressions hot anger tinged with juvenile fear.

Toka flicked reins. His mount spread great wings ripplingly, took a running leap, was shooting from the ledge and

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through the aerial traffic. Toka swung easily back in saddle as the Man Bat proned powerful body into arms-folded flight position. Up and north over the verdant bowl and its cattle herds the Man Bat soared. Molak had headed northeast, so the simple thing was to take a completely avoiding course. Reining his mount west, to circle in to Sandcliff, Toka flicked it to unattracting racing speed. He kept on a low level, to be out of sight of the cavern as quickly as possible. He glanced at the northern horizon. Two v's of purple specks, the recent spy flight to Sandcliff, were just winging into view on their driving way home. Still barely within viewing distance of that cavern home's black cliff formations, Toka glanced back.

The word must have spread with the speed of lightning. The swarms of Man Bats winging in practice maneuvers were ripping their riders from saddle and tearing them to death, were diving at breakneck speed toward the cavern.

Heavy-lidded yellow eyes fixed ahead into the west, Toka's mount was unaware of the happenings to the distant rear. Though grimly elated over those happenings, Toka fought himself surfacely casual, to communicate no warning to his racing mount. He must remain calm.

The cavern locale was safely left from view. On the south, the towering range of black cliffs ran endlessly ahead and behind. West, north and east, only the barren red flatlands stretched away to flat horizons. And Toka became ruthless in his demands for more speed. The gigantic Man Bat strained to oblige, began streaking till the air shrilled protest. Still Toka lashed his mount's tri-ridged skull for more speed, more, more! The monstrous Man Bat delved into powerful depths, screamed on to higher speed.

And ahead loomed barren red hills, marching straight out of the north to come down and abut the range of black cliffs. Toka shot low over the red hills and barren flatlands spreading endlessly on, banked his Man Bat straight north, to put the hills on his east right. Now midmorning old, the sun burned from an azure sky, cast the shadow of Toka and his straining mount grotesquely on the barren red resolation that was streaming swiftly back below.

Yes, grimly reflected Toka, the Man Bats and their masters had undoubtedly been set to destroying each other. But Molak had too completely imbued the Man Bats with hate for Sandcliff; no matter who won, Sandcliff would not yet be free of threat.

SUDDENLY, ahead to Toka's right, the familiar pinnacles of the white cliffs south of Sandcliff, then the red tips of Sandcliff's Topland's peaks, shot over the horizon. Also began to come into view, on the flatlands straight ahead, the mass of Big Snakes, lightly exercising. Then Sandcliff's terraced face grew down into view, people in angrily gesticulating groups on the terraces, all elevators still, all working stopped, all groups looking again and again to the group of commanders on the east end of terrace Twenty-five. Then Toka knew he had been spotted; all groups turned in his direction. He tore over the deployed mass of lightly training Big Snakes, was streaking over the great valley, was slamming in toward apartment One on the west end of terrace Twenty-five.

Hesitating at the approaching closer to the obviously waiting, angry enemy, Toka's colossal mount veered in wind-screaming flight. Toka firmly reined it in, banked tightly above the west end of Twenty-five. All Sandcliff was craning

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toward him with boiling anger. The grim-faced group that had raced from the east end to this of Twenty-five was stepping clear with battle-axes twirling viciously. Yet Toka brought his Man Bat to rest on the end balustrade. But even as he leaped from saddle with a questioning frown, his great Man Bat, as if sensing all was not well with this move by its Vice-Commander, whirled and dove away, spread its great wings, was streaking away across the valley and for the southeast.

Toka faced the group of commanders here. The rangy and handsome Rok, who was Roya's brother and Toka's best friend and second in command on Sandcliff, those dependable and homely twin brawnies, Nicky and Noola who were co-chiefs of Sandcliff's patrols, were white-faced, blazing eyed with anger as they stood poised with their vicious black battle-axes ready to whistle for Toka's head at the slightest move he might make.

"Hold it," quietly assured Toka.

The group of his friends, and the others rushing up to the action, started in surprise, scowled in disbelief.

Toka scrubbed his cosmetic disfigurements away.

"Toka!" gasped Rok.

"Holy hoptoads!" croaked Noola.

"I danged near cut yer dome off!" moaned Nicky.

"Where's Roya?" grimly demanded Toka. The cold uneasiness had him as his hearers silenced, as their faces grimmed back into vengeful anger.

"Some slimy rat in a fancy saddle on the biggest Man Bat we ever saw yet just took her!" Rok explained with hoarse effort.

"Dived out o' de sun jest a moment ago!" snarled Nicky in black anger. "While she was standin' alone in front o' her apartment!"

"De scummy rat nailed her before anyone could stop him!" choked Noolo. "An' went tearin' into de southeast!"

AS HIS loyal friends explained further in tumbling, anger-hot phrases, Toka steadied himself on the balustrade; obviously Roya had described the cavern accurately, had reported loyally, had tricked Molak even more adroitly than he had Tanda. As he obediently filled in the gaps of information with short, swift explanations and set the details flying by word of mouth over all Sandcliff, a sickness of self-despise engulfed Toka.

Roya—sacrificing so much for Sandcliff! Roya—now in the hands of that slimy archfiend!

White fires of rage exploded in Toka's fighter being and roared for vengeance. His voice rang with Royal command. "Ready all Big Snakes and ever male warrior on Sandcliff! We attack at once!"

The galvanized Rok and Nicky and Noola were racing to action. Toka was leaping into the familiar doorway of apartment One on Twenty-five.

Sandcliff's huge main drum, facing out from the middle of the balustrade of terrace Twenty-four, was imperiously thundering, "All Big Snakes to base! All Big Snakes to base!"

A moment later the terrible rolling rumble of the colossal reptiles' swift coming was on the air, was trembling massive Sandcliff.

"All male warriors!" thundered the great drum. "All male warriors! Prepare to attack! Prepare to attack!"

Tawny in iridescent green shorts and sandals of action slitness, enscrolled black battle knife glittering in white scabbard at waist, and swinging impatiently gleaming and intricately engraved great black battle-ax of renown, Toka was back onto Twenty-five. And Sandcliff was rocking with the milling

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of the arrived Big Snakes. Toka squeezed aboard a ready and loaded elevator and was speeding for terrace One. His military eye swept the efficiently fenzied scene.

On every terrace, lithe and ready and fully armed warriors were held by their women and children a moment in fierce farewell and blessing before each raced away to separate yet common duty. Equipment poured from Sandcliff's carefully secret storerooms and into elevators that raced it down to the clearings about Sandcliff's base. There, Big Snakes were an excitedly churning mass of colors. Warriors and women were feverishly working on the monstrous dinosaurs, fitting their backs with double rows of high saddles of white goatskin.

Off onto terrace One, Toka was jamming aboard an elevator down the sheer base. Below, grim warriors were holding battle-axes by handle necks and taking hold of ropes dangling from saddle pommels, were leaping sandaled feet against the Big Snakes' scaly bellies and sides and walking and climbing hand over hand to saddle. Battle-ax thonged to pommel, each warrior was tossed a bundle of green leaf-wrapped packs of water berries by a woman helper. Swaying easily in saddle, restlessly waiting, the men ripped open the packs, gorged the black, glistening, small fruit, stored tremendous amounts of miraculous healing and fighting power. Already over three-fourths of Sandcliff's warriors were thus ready, with reserve bundle of berries and battle gear thonged to each saddle skirt.

TOKA was now into the scene of efficient disorder, of shouted orders and acknowledgements, of small drums up on Sandcliff and down here staccatoing. Big Snakes impatiently rumbled to be off with their beloved masters. Their huge, protruding red eyes burned fierce fires on behalf of those human masters. Their reptilian necks, sinuous with colossal muscle power, undulated skyward. Their great yellow-toothed maws yawned wide to blast defiance at the yet-empty heavens.

Toka was to a tremendous, glistening, black, armor-plated monster. The driver's saddle, centrally set on the shoulders and directly in front of the spinal spikedness, was waiting. Sitting with feet snug in latcheted footrests at each side, renowned battle-ax thonged to pommel, Toka caught the bundle of water berries from a girl, ripped open a pack and gorged as he swayed with the restless motions of his powerful mount.

The keen-hearinged Big Snakes were trained to maneuver in response to the shouted one-syllable directives of their drivers; quirts were used for urging. Leaving the long quirt of plaited, white goatskin looped to pommel, Toka glanced back at his group aboard this Big Snake. Beyond two boys, the twin lines of berry-gorging warriors swept back to either side of the Big Snake's spinal spikedness from Toka's saddle, with enough space between each and all to stand in latcheted footrests and maneuver great battle weapons. As on every Big Snake, two boys—two for extra insurance in battle—were to the immediate right and left rear of the driver and had small brown command drums lashed before their pommels.

Toka was surging with water-berry force, with anguish for Roya. His fighting nerves screamed protest at this waiting. But ever available Big Snake had to be mounted by every available male in Sandcliff. And even the ancients were emphatically joining, wicked black battle-axes of old gleaming at pommel, vicious black battle knives of reknown glittering at waists. Only women and

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children would be left on Sandcliff. But no one questioned Toka's decision; with every energy, with every effort, all hurried to perfect the last detail.

Then the last Big Snake was at last mounted and facing southeast over the jungled valley. All eyes converged to Toka, in lead position out nearest the jungle.

Toka waited till the last woman scampered clear of the restless monsters, then raised his quirt high. All drivers did likewise. All warriors steadied, even the Big Snakes in anticipation.

Toka's voice split the silence. "On!" And down and square between his spike-back's colossal black shoulders he cracked his quirt. Under the heavily scaly skin Toka felt and saw the tremendous reptilian muscle sheaths bunch, flex and drive with terrible power, and his great monster was leaping ahead.

YELLS of fervent encouragement broke from Sandcliff's women and children, faded back. Hoarse battle yells were swelling a savage chorus from warrior throats. Closely packed Big Snakes were roaring thunderously. Great trees were snapping explosively as they went down to be trampled by huge feet speeding colossal reptilian bodies with unstoppable power. Through the dense jungle the force mowed its terrible way, to burst clear and shoot across the roiling Big Brown with a thunderous sideways geysering of sheets of water and tear again into the jungle. Straight southeast to the thinning edge of valley jungle it juggernauted its path. East of the jagged white-glowing cliff and up the valley's south shoulder of barren red hills it tore. Over and down in an acceleration of vast power it poured and was onto the desolate flatlands stretching away southeast.

Without turning to his drummer boys, Toka ordered, "Attack column!"

Instantly the drums barked, "Attack column! Attack column!"

Without one faltering step the force immediately flowed apart into a column ten Big Snakes wide, with each racing reptile ten lengths from the other. Driving a colossal green spike-back to Toka's right rear was Rok. Driving monstrous red armor-plates to Toka's left rear were Nicky and Noola. All were grim-faced and narrowed of warrior eye as they leaned into the wind. The Big Snakes' glistening scaliness rippled with terrible power. Their great heads were levelly low, their long necks undulating easily, their huge wickedly toothed maws set, their large pink nostrils flaring as they sucked in and exhaled great noisy draughts of air, their bulging red eyes burning with contagious anger.

The cheering was gone; mouthing water berries was the order. The last original packs were being devoured; remained only the reserves. The ear was filled with thunder rolling from huge feet, filled with the angry rumbling in deep bellies of colossal reptiles sensing the foulness they were racing to destroy. The dry red dust churned up by monstrous feet, the strong reptilian smell of straining bodies made sweatily glistening by the searing hot sun, crowded into the nostrils. Athletically beautiful warrior bodies, oozing sweat from the crushing heat, were soon like the Big Snakes on which they rode—caked with the red powder. And high out behind the racing battle force a red cloud of dust roiled up and hung along in the clear, still air.

But quirting his lead spike-back to greater effort and still greater effort, the other drivers imitating, into the flat southeast Toka savagely tore Sandcliff's hope. Tirelessly and faster and

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faster the Big Snakes drove in thundering speed, reeling up the vast flatness and spinning it back. Still Toka's great quirt rose and fell in cracking demand for speed, more speed, more, more! Still the others kept the heart-straining pace.

Constantly all eyes scanned ahead and swept the azure overhead. Incessantly all fighting beings strained forward. And frantically Toka's mind and heart cried out for Roya, somewhere below that horizon.

CHAPTER XVII

ROYA his unconscious prize, Molak raced from out the northwest to within view of the cavern, and stiffened at the distant scene. His sharply arrogant features hardened in puzzled anger. His gigantic mount also saw, and surged violently to wing wind-howlingly home to the unaccountable civil war.

The interior of the vast blue bore was a melee of male Man Bats of all developments and warriors, churning in vicious battle. Butchered and torn bodies of both were being trampled underfoot. But powerful on Bat milk and intimately familiar with the purple monsters' abilities and character, the near two thousand battle-wise warriors were holding thousands of the yet scantly armed gigantics from getting to the great storerooms of weapons. And even a cursory glance could see the losses were running twenty to one against the Man Bats.

Molak raced his yet uninformed and so yet obedient mount to rest on the parapet of the violently disordered balcony. Unthonging battle-ax from pommel, holding Roya in one arm, Molak was dismounted by his Man Bat, then it leaped away to join the fight.

Carrying Roya effortlessly under one arm, Molak raced to the corridor. Its door had been torn away, and within a scene of stony wreckage struck Molak's eye. Broken furniture and doors littered the corridor; the whole apartment had obviously been devastated by violent anger. In to his wildly disordered quarters, Molak found the torch, reassembled a candelabra, lit it, tossed Roya onto his wrecked bed. She sprawled grotesquely and disheveledly awry. Snatching three urns of Bat milk from the wreckage, Molak was out of his room, propping a door in place and piling heavy pieces of the corridor wreckage against it. He downed the Bat milk as he raced onto his balcony. He leaped over the parapet, was down to the deserted signal drum and blinker disk.

He throbbed the drum in rallying message, "Molak speaking! Hold the dirty buzzards, boys! But don't kill any more than you have to! I'll get them in control!"

Battle yells chorused from his desperate warriors.

Molak was training the blinker disk into the Man Bats. "Man Bats!" All Man Bats! Molak speaking! Cease fighting and explain! My warriors will cease when you do! Your Great Molak orders it!"

The Man Bats broke off fighting, to surge with sullen anger toward Molak.

Leaping and swinging up to his balcony, beyond immediate reach, Molak stood wide-legged on the cavern-side parapet. He swiftly estimated his forces: not more than five thousand Man Bats of all sizes, and there were not over fifteen hundred warriors left to lead them.

But with impressive fearlessness, Molak faced out over his seething pawns, and suavely dactylated, "My good Man Bats. Consider. I am still your friend. Only see what I have to say, after I consult my Vice-Commanders."

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THEIR anger thinly held for the moment, the gory dead ignored for the time, Man Bats and warriors milled in separate groups.

"Loose Lip," beckoned Molak," "come up here."

Loose Lip separated from the warriors, ran to the balcony, leaped, caught the parapet, swung over.

"What happened here anyway?" demanded Molak in icy anger.

"First, the Man Bats got wind of one of their girls being done in, back in your apartment."

Molak smiled thinly. His green eyes glittered coldly. "And who told them that little tale?"

"Those two brats working for you and Tanda, Chief."

"And who told them?"

Loose Lip shrugged. "But they went nuts and boiled into your place. They found the girl all right. And they found Scar Belly, stuck in the heart and kicked under your bed. Scar Belly, stuck in the heart and kicked under your bed."

"So." Then Molak's expression of icy consideration adroitly changed to one of warm sympathy as he turned to the waiting Man Bats and warriors. "I have just heard of your violated girl, and of my murdered Vice-Commander, Scar Belly." He paused effectively. "We have just cause for killing the one or ones who would commit such foul crimes against us!"

The Man Bats' ugly green-lipped purple features frowned wonderment at Molak's admission of the justice of their violent actions.

"But," went on Molak in calm logic, "it would be best to make sure we have vengeance on the really guilty ones. Now think. Have I or my lads, until you forced us to protect ourselves now, ever so much as injured one of your members?"

The Man Bats thoughtfully admitted the apparent truth of Molak's statement.

"And you also know," surely led Molak, "that the Sandcliff Prince was here spying on us. Sandcliff knows it can't resist us in man for man fighting. So their Prince comes here, to try to set us against each other, so we'll kill each other off and Sandcliff won't have to fight us."

The Man Bats were tensely heeding Molak's adroit logic. His knowing warriors kept their own coarse faces straight.

"And what better way to turn us against each other," played Molak in righteous indignation, "than by enticing one of your good girls right into my apartment and there deliberately and cold-bloodedly murdering the lovely creature!"

The Man Bats were intently watching Molak's dactylating hands now, were swallowing his shrewd poison, were turning their rage elsewhere—where Molak wanted it turned.

"And of course the reason for Scar Belly's murder is plain," served Molak. "He evidently suspected what was happening. He was moving to protect your girl, when the evilly cunning Sandcliff Prince set a trap for him and murdered him without a chance!"

The Man Bats milled in new, restless anger.

"So now," dosed Molak, "you see why I've been telling you we must destroy Sandcliff completely!"

"Our Great Molak is right!" began dactylating the Man Bats.

Molak frowned seriously for them. "Of course I'm right. You know me and my lads would never do you any wrong."

"We're sorry we killed so many of our human friends," humbly apologized group after group of Man Bats.

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"I'm sure it won't happen again," expansively accepted Molak. Then he dactylated in righteous anger, "But let us seek vengeance on those who caused us to fight, who would destroy us—who would defile your women!"

"Lead us into battle, O Great Molak!" instantly boiled the Man Bats. "Lead us to the destroying of our enemies!"

ONLY Molak's cold green eyes revealed any hint of his gloating over his triumph here. "Very well, my winged comrades. Clear away our common dead. Report to your warrior leaders. Form a spy flight to take off at once." He paused dramatically. "Tonight—we destroy Sandcliff!"

His hearers hailed the news, raced into the preparations.

Stepping from the parapet and striding for the jumbled corridor, Molak smiled amusedly at the grinning Loose Lip. "What suckers, eh, Loose Lip?"

"And what a gift of gab, Chief."

Molak chuckled at the compliment. "Mind over mob, Loose Lip."

In front of Molak's piled door, Loose Lip frowned. "But we sure lost a lot of lads and Man Bats, Chief."

"More than enough left for Sandcliff," dismissed Molak. "Sixty-five hundred lads and Man Bats against three thousand saps and forty-five hundred women and brats and old men."

Loose Lip grinned anticipation. "And the way the Man Bats keep having kids, and the way those kids grow, we'll soon have enough purple suckers to lick anybody."

"Okay, Loose Lip," commissioned Molak. "You're in full command under me now. So get things going."

"Right, Chief!" saluted Loose Lip, and eagerly hurried away.

Battle-ax swinging ready, Molak stepped to Tanda's quarters. "Tanda!" His whiplash voice echoed in the black spaciousness. Finding a torch, he looked about the immense black room. In the leaping flame of the torch, the wreckage was spread thick. Tanda's red fur briefs and sheer attire were torn and scattered. Many of her jewels glittered here and there on the floor as Molak stepped warily about. The pool was empty. No body was under any of the wreckage. No blood. And an apparently secret small room in the wall to one side of where Tanda's dressing chest had stood yawned empty, its door torn away. Evidently the Man Bats had replaced their lost girl.

Shrugging indifference, Molak stepped for his own room and Roya.

CHAPTER XVIII

EVER into the flat southeast Toka tore Sandcliff's hope, his own hope. Surely Molak and the captive Roya had reached that evil cavern. What would the yellow-haired sleek devil do about that civil war? What would he do with Roya! If Molak was attacked by his purple gigantic—

Toka's mental anguish was whipped aside as two v's of six purple specks shot over the southeast horizon.

Alert drummer lookouts instantly saw and were staccatoing, "Enemy flight straight ahead! Enemy straight ahead!"

That flight meant Molak had somehow regained control of his civil warring forces. Od did it? The six Man Bats were riderless, unarmed. But all spy flights had been riderless, unarmed—until Molak snatched Roya. Toka watched the two high-flying v's hurtle onward, saw their ugly features twitch, their yellow eyes widen in surprise, then narrow keenly as they beheld the great battle force that could be tearing for

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nothing but their cavern.

With swift blue winklings of blinkers, around in a wide circle and high over Sandcliff's battle force the spy flight streaked in unbroken formation, the sunlight gleaming on their purple nakedness and great spreads of rippling wings. Then back for the flat southeast the flight tore on a line, driving for home with the terrible urgency to report—to Molak, or to fellow Man Bats?

CHAPTER XIX

THE gloom of Molak's great black room was only partially dispelled by the yellow, dancing cluster of tongues of the lone candelabra. Disheveled, hands at throat in expression of shock, Roya was just sitting up on Molak's wrecked bed. Molak stepped in, leaned his battle-ax against the door casing, then placed the wrecked door in place again and began piling the wreckage against it, then turned leisurely toward Roya, standing away toward the pool.

"You're not afraid, Roya?" softly mocked Molak.

Nebulous in the black shadowing at the pool edge, Roya crouched, whitely silent.

Watchfully blocking any break Roya might attempt, Molak lazily advanced through the wavering gloom. "We didn't get to know each other very well before you returned to Sandcliff, Roya."

Roya edged along the pool lip.

From out his shadowed and candle-shown face, Molak's green eyes glittered his intent. His voice was an oily implication. "But I'm sure we'll soon know each other very well. Very well indeed. Eh, Roya?"

Roya was to the very end of the pool lip, where it joined the wall. The ever-alert Molak advanced slowly, leisurely, implacably, at a direct angle. Roya whirled and dove into the black pool. The geysering splash shimmered and echoed in the gloomed room. As Roya broke water at the back, Molak was chuckling in slimy lecherousness at the lip of the rippling pool.

"So you feel like swimming, eh? Very well." Buckling off his battle knife and dropping it to the floor, Molak knelt to untie the laces of his right sandal.

Roya's face was a pale oval of fear in the black gloom at the back of the pool. Smiling anticipation, Molak kept glancing at her. He had his right sandal off, was untying the lace of the left, kicked it off and stood up.

A frantic fist pounded Molak's barricaded door. He jerked around in cold irritation.

"Chief!" filtered through the excited rasp of Loose Lip. "Chief! They're coming after us!"

"Talk sense!" cracked Molak. "Who's coming after us!"

"Spy flight reports every rat on Sandcliff is riding Big Snakes for here like greased bats from Hell! And that Sandcliff Prince is leading the pack!"

Molak's jaws snapped. His voice was a cracking whip. "Ready all flights for attack!" He hitched his shorts back on straight. "Arm even the brats—every sucker in the place able to hold a knife and ax!"

"Right, Chief!"

Sneering, Molak swiftly had his sandals back on and his knife back at waist. His gaze centered toward Roya's pale face at the back of the pool.

His voice was sardonic. "I'm sure you woudn't want to miss this little party, Roya."

DRUMS were staccatoing sharply through the cavern. There was a muffled bustle of fevered readying. But with the news of Toka and Sandcliff coming to the attack in full power, Roya seemed to have gotten a new in-

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ner strength; her face was no longer one with fear.

"So," savored Molak, "I have to drag you out, eh?" He leaped in with a geysering splash. Roya's lucent body dove around him and for the pool stairway. Molak convulsed. His fingers closed around her kicking ankle and drew her fighting to the pool bottom. The water roiled in its shadowy depths as Molak fought his arms around her, caught her wrists in back of her, surged up, hauled her sobbing and kicking up the pool steps. He yanked her to his wrecked dressing chest, found two short lengths of gleaming black rope and lashed one bitingly tight about her wrists. He tossed her onto the wrecked bed, leaped after her and caught her viciously flashing slenderness of legs tight, lashed the second rope about her trim ankles.

Seeing further struggle was useless, Roya lay still. The yellow flickering of the candelabra showed her dripping blondeness lay about her head and shoulders in glistening sheaths, showed her awry scant attire revealed her dropletted physicalness with skin-like adherence. Molak frankly admired her as he snatched up an urn of Bat milk and drank its contents, then another from the wreckage, for a full dozen.

"Sop your slimy self in it," sneered Roya. "Toka will kill you anyway."

His thin, arrogant lips quirking amusement, Molak slung her effortlessly onto his left shoulder. "You shall have the pleasure of seeing who will kill who, Roya my dear." At the barricaded door, he took his great battle-ax, swung it dexterously and effortlessly knocked the huge pile of heavy wreckage aside and strode out.

The burning sun was just passing through the first quarter past midday. Roya an easy burden, Molak strode to the fore parapet of his balcony and shot his glance about.

Every young to old male resident of the cavern was here mobilized, every being except the infants and cloistered and not-to-be-seen women of the Man Bats. And leading all this were brutal and skilled human warriors. All, men and Man Bats alike, were guzzling urn after urn of the milk in great gulps. All were readying in swift deadliness. All were seethingly restless, their wicked battle gear glittering and glowing in the sunlight and the glow from the great blue cavern behind them. Even the Man Bats who had survived the recent civil war with loss of arm or leg, hand or foot or part of wing, were angrily eager. Unharmed from the recent civil war, Molak's Man Bat, the most gigantic of all, waited below the balcony.

"Mount me!" dactylated Molak.

The Man Bat reached up, hoisted Molak and the wisely quiet Roya down to saddle. Molak settled himself, laid Roya face-down across his thighs and saddle pommel. An armed servant boy raced up, tossed Molak a wrist blinker. Guiding his mount to the fore of the readying flights, Molak glanced around as he finished off another dozen urns of Bat milk.

THERE was a last moment hustling of getting set, of thonging Battle-axes to pommels, of testing the nets holding reserve urns of Bat milk to each saddle skirt, of tightening reins, of adjusting wrist blinkers. Molak chuckled at this power that was so flexibly obedient to his slightest order. It was war power, terrible even in its remaining strength.

Loose Lip was on a powerful mount near Molak and Roya. The ugly's eager face suddenly twitched. "Chief! Out on the flatlands!"

All eyes, Roya's too, followed. Plum-

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ing above the flat northwest was a tremendous, roiling column of red dust, growing and swiftly growing higher and trailing out behind as the great battle force that gave it birth streaked ever forward with irresistible power.

"Hear it, Chief!" gaped Loose Lip.

Into human ears and with rising volume hammered the rolling, rolling, rolling thunder of tremendous dinosaurian feet racing down the distance.

Molak sneered.

Loose Lip was canny of licentious eye. "Why not fly direct to Sandcliff, Chief? Can't be nothing but women and kids there now."

Molak smiled thinly, raised his left arm. As all eyes eagerly waited, Molak's blinker flashed, "All flights! Take off!"

Molak was whipping his powerful mount to action. His battle force swarmed to wing with him, the flight leaders ribaldly cheering. The extra burden of Roya was seemingly nothing to Molak's gigantic creature as it shot into the lead.

Up and straight for the oncoming columning cloud of red Molak tore his winged army. Great, ugly purple Man Bat features were writhing for vengeance, with anticipation, with grim joy for bloody destruction. Brutal features of human warriors were avid for battle, with lust to be satisfied after battle. Up and up and on and on Molak streaked his powerful armada, a great purple wedge of ominous evil screaming across the sky's blue cleanness.

CHAPTER XX

HALFWAY to Roya and the cavern now. Then even as Toka quirted his dust-caked black spike-back for yet more thundering speed, the purple swarm poured up over the far horizon.

"Enemy straight on high!" staccatoed the alert drummer boys.

A bolt of electric tension shot through Sandcliff's racing battle force. The colossal Big Snakes yawned their yellow-toothed maws and began bellowing for battle.

Toka's fighting blood and nerves roared and screamed as he saw the point of the winging wedge, saw Molak's fancy saddle and bridle glittering bluely in the sun's rays, saw—across the devil's thighs and pommel—the quiet form of Roya!

Toka's voice cut through the terrible thundering and roaring. "Ready battle-axes!" The command was drumming through the battle force, "Ready battle-axes! . . . Ready battle-axes! . . ."

In a split moment the great black battle weapons were snatched from pommels and swung ready in powerful and adroit right hands.

Toka's superkeen eyes burned on the swiftly approaching purple wedge so high against the blue sky. Though Molak had obviously scoured the cavern for every last flyable Man Bat—even the youngest boys, for diverting fodder—he led an overwhelming superiority of fully five thousand armed Man Bats and fifteen hundred battle-geared warriors.

The range of towering black cliffs was rising over the horizon, and the vast blue-glowing cavern was drawing swiftly closer and closer. But Toka's main attention was ten thousand airline paces up ahead, on Roya and Molak. Toka could see Roya was not unconscious, was lying relaxed, blonde hair whipping back as she watched this power of Sandcliff roaring to the attack. In assurance, Toka waved his great battle-ax to her. His fighting heart swelled as she smiled back in rousing confidence.

Toka raised his left arm, and with the wrist blinker he'd worn from the cavern,

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flashed, "Man Bats! You know Sandcliff has never harmed you! You have been misled by false masters! We intend you no harm! But if you do not surrender our Princess and live in peace, we destroy you!"

At once Molak moved to counter Toka's psychological maneuver. "See how they lie!" flashed Molak with an amused smile to his hordes. And the Man Bats sneered angry despise.

Onward Toka raced Sandcliff's straining battle-force. Forward Molak raced his angrily streaking armada, was winging five thousand paces high overhead now. And shrilly through the terrible thundering and roaring of Sandcliff's battle force came the wind-screaming of the terrifically speeding swarm of Man Bats as their thousands of huge wings tore through the air.

Like the others, like even the Big Snakes as they raced unfaltering on the assigned coarse, Toka was craning up and back now to watch. Sunlight shimmering on driving wings and starkly naked bodies, the broad tail of the colossal aerial wedge shot back high overhead—Sandcliff bound? No signal came from Molak; the sleek, yellow-haired devil only sneered mockingly down at Toka.

TOKA fought himself not to falter from his strategy. Surely those Man Bats would not risk their women to this ground attack? Surely Molak and his renegades could not overcome such a basic instinct? But with a portion of his outnumbering aerial force Molak might—

Toka and his force, Molak too, saw that scores of the Man Bats were wavering ever so slightly from discipline as their burning yellow eyes saw Sandcliff's terrible force thunder unswervingly on for the cavern.

At once Molak blinkered, "Flights divide right and left!"

The wind-howling aerial force slit twain and flowed into two long columns of three Man Bats abreast. Molak banked his great mount sharply, to come tearing back between the two swiftly circling aerial arms.

So, grimly savored Toka, the first test of wills went to Sandcliff. Toka's voice rang the order. "Ready for battle!" The drums were staccatoing, "Ready for battle! . . . Ready for battle! . . . Ready for battle! . . ."

Imitating Toka, all warriors were riding erect and astride saddles, their feet firm in latcheted footrests, their great black battle-axes swinging dexterously in flexibly wristed right hands. Toka and the other drivers looped their quirts to pommels. The drummer boys sat ready over their drums. Blue battle-axes swinging expertly ready in right hands, ugly green-mouthed purple Man Bat features writhing vengeful anger, coarse renegade faces lustfully eager, the two halves of Molak's flights were now winging back toward each other in a great aerial pincer.

And Molak flashed, "Attack!"

Instantly his aerial pincers poured down at oncoming and intercepting angles. But Molak with Roya was streaking around in a wide circle overhead and watching with mocking arrogance.

Toka's inner being raged with frustration. "Defense circle!" As the drums staccatoed he called to his powerfully racing Big Snake and heard the other drivers doing likewise to theirs, "Left!"

Without slackening one roaring pace the ten lines of Big Snakes thundered around after him. The diving pincers of robot-minded Man Bats and riders wavered, looked to their dictator to redecide.

As Toka shifted his big black spike-back from center to tear along just be-

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yond the outer line and lead Sandcliff's battle force into a continuous racing circle that would be two thousand paces across and of ten rings, he saw a surprised but arrogantly sneering Molak swiftly blinker to his winged hordes, "West pincer, circle outside with enemy and prepare to attack under Loose Lip's command! East pincer, reform at this level under my command!"

And where was Molak going with that latter half of his hordes? Toka was afraid he knew! But even as Molak's angry legions began reshifting to obey, Sandcliffs' force was ten rings that were churning up an enormous pillar of red dust into which the burning sun came only dimly. Still tearing along with the circle's direction, Toka yelled his black spike-back wide to his right and toward the edge of this round cloud, till he dimly made out through the swirling red haze that half of Molak's force was an endless triple ring at one hundred paces altitude as it air-howled around in the sun-bright clear beyond, looking to Loose Lip somewhere above for signal.

BACK in the dust cloud, the Big Snakes were huge wraiths racing round and round in the red gloom. Via his drummers Toka at once reported, "Half enemy three rings outside in our direction and one hundred paces high!" Then he commanded, "Reverse!"

There was a split instant's break in the Big Snakes' thunderous racing as in response to their driver's commands the monsters unitedly reared to sand-spraying stops, whirled and were counter circling with terrible speed. Toka continued as before, and saw the Man Bats and riders apparently were yet unable to see the change of direction.

"Enemy unsuspecting!" reported Toka. Then, "Enemy attacking!" he warned, and yelled his big black spike-back deeper into the clouds as the rings of Man Bats and riders broke and came swarming down and in.

Deep in the gloom of the swirling red storm, Sandcliff warriors, with battle cries welling, were standing astride saddles and meeting the consternated aerial attackers. Angry sparks spewed into the violent fog of dust as bewilderedly wielded blue battle-axes were crashing to each other as much as to glittering black surely driven ones. Racing unabated, colossal reptiles were darting their maws with trained speed almost of lightning to catch Man Bats and riders and crush the wing-slamming purple creatures and as instantly spit them out, now green gore, their renegade riders now red pulps of lifelessness. Inevitably, in this confusing moment for the enemy, some Sandcliff warriors were butchered from saddle and their Big Snakes sent reeling to death. But renegades and Man Bats, especially the young untrained fodder, collided, butchered each other as their drives went wild, and then fell like great, butchered flies against Sandcliff's surprise defense, were instantly green-and-red blood and gore under Big Snake's racing feet.

But in instants the remaining Man Bats and riders were recovering from their costly discovery, were attacking with even fiercer anger.

"Reverse!" ordered Toka via drummers as he battled amid the flying gore.

Never ceasing their roaring battling, Sandcliff's Big Snakes reared as one, whirled and were ten lines fiercely circling and fighting the opposite way. Again the winging enemy paid dearly before it recovered from surprise, but then reattacked with insane ferocity

"Odd rings, reverse!" ordered Toka as his reknowned battle-ax screamed bloody triumph.

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The odd-numbered rings, beginning with the outer, reared, whirled, were streaking counterwise to the even-numbered rings. And the bewildered enemy were decimated. The few remaining renegades and Man Bats winged off.

"Even rings, reverse!" Toka was racing with and beside those who had been in the column's front line from Sandcliff. "Reform column!"

Big Snakes' wounds coagulating, warriors' wounds healing swiftly sound via water berry power, Toka's force lined out behind him, ten abreast as before. This first round of battle had taken but a handful of violent moments. But from what Toka could glimpse through the swirling haze, he judged fully two hundred of Sandcliff's finest warriors and near fifty Big Snakes would rise no more. Yet the field was being left knee-deep with gore of fallen Man Bats and renegades.

But the torturing thought he had had all during battle knifed Toka. Roya and Molak—Sandcliff bound with that remaining horde!

TOKA craned swiftly about as he burst from the huge dust cloud. And barely visible, high away in the blue northwest, Molak *was* tearing his intact half of battle force for Sandcliff! But, saw Toka, the Man Bats and riders were watching back here, were now seeing the frantic blinkerings of the handful of survivors, were seeing again this victorious Sandcliff force tearing on for the vital southeast and the blue cavern in the towering range of black cliffs.

Toka raised his left arm and blinkered, "Man Bats! If your Great Molak surrenders our Princess, we spare you and your women!" Then with rising and falling quirt, on he raced his force. The distant Man Bats wavered. Molak had to give up trying to lead them for Sandcliff or risk rebellion. He began swinging around in a wide arc. And his sharp face was not quite so arrogantly confident now, as he led his wedge of purple Man Bats on around with air-howling speed, apparently to attack Sandcliff's columns headon.

"Battle as we go!" commanded Toka. The drums were staccatoing it back. "Battle as we go! . . . Battle as we go! . . ."

The twenty-five hundred remaining Man Bats and their eight hundred riders howled around high ahead and came tearing back.

"Attack!" flashed Molak, and swung clear as his horde spread out and dove to obey.

They evidently expected Sandcliff's force to again execute the circle maneuver, were momentarily confused when it didn't. They swerved, glanced to Molak, who was streaking around at one thousand aloof paces.

"Attack at opportunity!" he impatiently blinkered.

On down and in air-screamed the Man Bats and riders from all directions, tremendous and ordinary size battle-axes whistling angrily.

"Shift!" yelled Toka to his black spike-back, and heard other drivers repeating to their reptiles.

NEVER pausing one thundering pace, the ten lines of onward racing Big Snakes began flowing through each other in unexpected and abruptly changing patterns. And without a falter, the great long-necked reptiles were darting their wicked maws of yellow teeth at the consternated attackers as Sandcliff's warriors rode astride saddles and blasted the confused charge against them.

Man Bats and riders, trying to counter the bewildering, shifting defense, fell by the hundreds. Then one of Toka's drummer boys fell with a

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scream. Toka's wrist blinker shattered, but saved his hand. Yet great black battle-ax screaming savage victory over all comers. Toka stood astride saddle and now thundered the way into the green bowl. The huge red cattle stampeded crazily and added to the battle's wildness.

And out of the colossal blue cavern poured nearly a thousand frenzied Man Bats! They were wingless, armless and one-legged survivors of that civil war. Carrying huge axes, or only themselves, they poured off the vast black ledge and charged down the verdant slopes.

The winged Man Bats, too, were frantic now and tore in with fierce abandon. Sandcliff's gore-covered but adroitly shifting force battled on with their own savage determination to scourge this evil from the face of the earth.

But Roya his anguishedly watching captive, an anxiously frowning Molak still remained aloof at one thousand paces, flashing counter-commands that were beginning to anticipate Sandcliff's shifting patterns.

As the cripples from the cavern now charged into the fray with a reckless determination to blunt this drive, Toka and his Sandcliff warriors rode on and drove their great black battle-axes with every skill they knew. The flashing weapons screamed through tan yelling throats or purple voiceless ones, shattered tri-ridged skulls and showered green blood, laid exposively fighting bodies open from groin to throat and spilled away their warm viscera.

Man Bats screamed their tremendous battle-axes through Big Snakes' fighting necks. The monstrous reptiles collapsed, rolling, spilling their riders. Man Bats converged on these fallen. But it was battle unto death; in one vicious instant Sandcliff warriors, Big Snake and the Man Bats were all only more still-alive gore scattered over the great bowl's verdure.

Other mortally careening Big Snakes and riders were trampled to slippery pulps by more thundering up to slam the attack on home.

And still Molak remained clear—Roya his helplessly watching captive! Molak seemed to know that, win or lose, no ground force could catch him as long as he remained air-borne. But how much longer could he keep that seething mad monster flying up there?

Again and again the Man Bats were centered by their leader on Sandcliff's leader. In an endless passage of time Toka screamed his ferocious black battle weapon. And he and his remaining group on the big black spike-back became fighting demons covered with even more blood, dust and gore. Yet Toka's bloody and dusty, gory and roaring mad colossal black monster battled on and on, for the west end of the vast ledge. More raging Big Snakes and savage riders were battling to it now.

"Stay on ledge!" Toka's command was staccatoed to his fighting forces. "Stay on ledge! . . . Stay on—" Toka's last loyal drummer boy paid his young life to a screaming Man Bat ax for the moment taken to relay that order.

TOKA leaped from his intelligently raging spike-back, and the bloody and dusty black monster battled protectingly over him as he raced to the huge blinker disk and began flashing, "Man Bats! Your last chance! Surrender our Princess! Surrender your false leaders! You can't stop us! You can't stop us! Surrender our Princess and we spare you and your women!"

The roaring battle abruptly waned.

But Molak!

At the first word, the bitterly defeated fiend whipped out his battle knife and slashed his Man Bat's yellow

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eyes from the sockets. Though the sockets swiftly healed, the sudden shock caused the purple monster to drop its tremendous ax.

The hard-faced Molak was tapping on its tri-ridged skull, "I couldn't stop them from doing it! Trust me!"

The gullible gigantic nodded, and Molak was racing away, was holding Roya firm across his thighs and pommel, was streaking into the east!

Winging uncertainly just overhead here, the same three hundred remaining Man Bats—having acquired a painful education from Sandcliff's battle-axes—instantly signaled acceptance of Toka's terms. But their riders reined to follow Molak. In explosive anger the war-sick Man Bats rebelled. The renegade warriors screamed their wicked axes into the purple monsters in urging. But careless of death now, the Man Bats tore their fallen masters limb from limb even as they themselves plunged to death on the ledge or bowl.

But Toka was commanding to a gore-covered Rok who was preparing to race his Big Snake after Molak and Roya, "Take command here, Rok! Wreck everything but Bat milk and the women's quarters—after I get from sight!"

Toka was aboard his big black spike-back and wheeling to get Roya and then Molak—no matter if it took the rest of a lifetime and eternity too.

But the only remaining Bat Man here, a tremendously powerful creature devoid of battle gear but still saddled and bridled, swooped toward Toka in surrender.

Toka stood up and dactylated, "Mount me—and catch Molak and the Princess!"

The Man Bat snatched Toka to its saddle, and dactylated, "So shall I repent the wickedness into which my race has been led!" and was tearing over the bowl of Death.

Toka spared a split moment's glance. Sandcliff's force was swiftly attending to its casualties, feeding reserves of water berries, seeing wounds heal sound and seemingly dead bodies recover, seeing amputated limbs affixed and begin growing back into normal condition. But there were many too gone for even the miracle powers of water berries or captured stores of Bat milk to revive. Big snakes stood or lay around, licking their own wounds.

Thonging blood-dripping battle-ax to pommel, Toka ripped open reserve pack of black water berries at his waist, began mouthing their juicy freshness and feeling his spent powers begin surging back in full volume as he whipped his Man Bat faster—faster!

Molak and Roya and Man Bat were a mere speck in the blue east. But Molak's mount—though a gigantic of the gigantics—was burdened by two, was blind, was surely not feeling its best. And Toka's vengefully straining Man Bat was rippling its great purple wings till the wind was screaming shrill protest at this boring through it. The cavern had long since been left from view, and to all horizons stretched uncharted and lifeless desolation, burning under the early afternoon sun.

But Toka only knew Roya was ahead, in those vile hands of the Mad Molak!

CHAPTER XXI

UP AND up and on and on Toka's Man Bat raced, so bent on repaying Toka and Sandcliff that it needed no guidance, no urging. And the distant speck ahead grew no smaller, grew slowly larger. Toka had gorged his entire emergency pack of water berries, and his strength was surging anew, his being roaring for action. He unthonged his blood-smeared battle-ax from pom-

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mel, held it ready.

Ten thousand paces separated him from Roya and Molak now, then it was eight, six, five, four. And Molak was glancing back and down, his arrogantly hard face sharp in anxious anger. Jaw grim, eyes burning with rage, Toka saw only Molak and Roya, Roya looking down and back as the wind whipped through her blondeness; Roya, seeing Toka racing higher and closer. They were all so high now that the earth was a red blur below, so high the air was cold and thin and made the lungs labor and the heart pound. The sky became dark blue as from the far east raced the approaching night in pursuit of the burning sun.

Molak obviously saw he could never outfly Toka and—

Good God!

The yellow-haired devil was hefting the frantically protesting but bound Roya over his sleek head, was tossing her away! Her scream slit Toka's sickened heart with cold fear.

Molak was banking his blind mount tightly. Toka's mount leveled, tore to intercept the tumbling Roya. Molak came diving for Toka. Toka's anxiety screamed; how could he catch Roya while beating off Molak!

No longer screaming, Roya was now trying to straighten her lovely body, trying to turn her tumbling into a glide, easier for Toka to snatch her. Blue battle-ax blurring, Molak was raging in on Toka. Toka screamed his bloody black ax to drive off Molak. But Toka's mount abruptly banked away. Molak and his blind mount shot windhowlingly past out of reach. And Roya plunged away on down.

Toka made to dactylate angrily at his mount, then saw its strategy. It power dived so fast Roya seemed shooting up feet first. Toka, standing up and back in the stirrups, noted Molak was banking back, but was too far to interfere. Coming parallel with Roya's diving body, Toka's Man Bat reached out, gently but firmly grasped her, leveled off as it reached Roya back up to longing arms. Cradling her preciousness tight with one arm, Toka thonged his battle-ax to pommel.

"Oh, Toka!" softly cried Roya in relief and anguish.

"Easy, Roya," whispered Toka above the wind's screaming, and started to feel free the knots of her bonds.

But Molak was raging in again. Toka let his mount take over. It spun away, but burdened with two it was too slow; Molak's angry battle-ax whistled away its left wing tip. Toka's mount wobbled slightly, righted, winged strong again. Toka knew he could not fight Molak thus; he put his Man Bat into a dive. Down raced Molak in furious pursuit, expertly guiding his horribly blinded Man Bat. Aided by the pull of the earth and burdened by two, Toka's mount easily kept the distance.

TOKA tried again to free Roya's vicious bonds as he held her in plummeting descent. But the knots were heinously complicated! He whipped out his black battle knife, slashed at the black ropes. Even his renowned blade only struck sparks and glanced off in defeat. He sheathed his battle blade, fingered frantically at the knots.

Down and down pursued and pursuer streaked. Eight thousand paces, seven, six, five, four, three in split moments with the wind screaming high protest and slamming into faces and tearing at bodies. Her blonde hair's scented silken strands whipping about his face, Roya clung to Toka and stared up at their vengeful pursuer. Up slammed the sun-burning red earth like an exploding maw. To two thousand paces Toka and Roya plunged—and

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the knots of her bonds would not free! On they hurtled to one thousand paces in a shred of time.

"I'll put you off and return!" decided Toka in Roya's ear as their Man Bat streaked to five hundred paces and began pulling out.

Their Man Bat leveled to an air-howling and streaking five paces above the blurring red sandiness. Face a mad demon's mask of hate, battle-ax blurring bluely about sleek head in preparation, Molak was one hundred paces back, closing fast, was only ten paces back. Toka's mount abruptly flexed wings, spun, one purple wing tip brushing the sand. Blindly unable to make the sharp turn, Molak and his mount shot past in a screaming blur of speed. Toka's mount leveled, landed lightly.

Toka lowered Roya to the Man Bat's huge purple arms, and dactylated, "Lie her down!"

Smiling assurance as she lay looking up at him from the hot red sand, Toka unthonged his battle-ax. Molak came streaking in, leaning low from saddle, his battle-ax swinging for the tri-ridged skull of Toka's mount.

As his own mount leaped aside, Toka swayed easily in saddle and parried Molak's ax with an explosive clashing that sent the vicious sparks showering. Then Molak shot past, was banking. Toka's mount was taking off, circling protectingly five paces above Roya. Sneering over his shoulder, Molak spiraled his blind gigantic upward in challenge.

As Toka raced his Man Bat to accept, it dactylated, "Free yourself for battle, Master! Trust the maneuvering to me!"

"Carry on!" Toka knotted the reins loosely to pommel. Roya became a mere blond, tan speck on the red desolation far below. Again Toka told himself he'd had to accept Molak's challenge. To leave the mad devil free to destroy his and Roya's Man Bat was to leave themselves to Molak's taste. An armed and mounted Molak against an unmounted pair, only one of whom was armed, would be only too easily victorious in this personal war here.

AT FIVE thousand paces, Molak leveled off, banked in a wide turn, stood in saddle and came hurtling for Toka. Toka's mount only streaked wind-howlingly for the battle. Black ax blurring about head, Toka's fighter being sang for action. Molak sneered mockingly. It was three hundred paces, two hundred. No slackening of screaming speed. One hundred paces. And Toka was standing in saddle. Molak wing-upped his mount right, leaned out with blurring battle-ax. Toka's mount wing-upped left. Toka leaned out. His battle weapon screamed, clashed mightily against Molak's, sliced down and through the wing of Molak's Man Bat, as Molak did likewise to Toka's mount.

But the wing wounds closed instantly. And it was a spinning, streaking battle of great axes clashing in one unsatisfying and indecisive split moment of anger, of Man Bat wings being sliced through and the shreds fluttering away.

As the next clash streaked closer, Toka sensed the resolving desperation of his repentent mount. On straight for Molak's mount it tore on raggedy wings. At the last moment its great purple arms and hands shot out. Toka braced himself and slashed viciously as Molak slashed at the reaching arms. Toka's blow missed. Molak butchered one huge hand of Toka's mount clear, then the purple gigantics were locked in a crazedly fighting embrace.

Before Toka could counter, Molak's battle-ax was screaming back, through the neck of Toka's gallant mount. The great tri-ridged head spun away, trailing the severed reins. Toka's ravenous battle-ax whistled through the neck of

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Kola raised his axe, and the broken-nosed one attacked

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Molak's mount and that colossal head also shot away, trailing fancy reins. The neck amputations instantly healed with purple scar tissue that swiftly turned to smooth skin, with a round opening for the windpipe. And still the Man Bat bodies savagely wrestled and slammed their rags of wings as Toka and Molak slashed wildly but vainly at each other. Down, on down tumbled the Man Bats, butchered to reluctantly dying pieces. And the red desolation, Roya a scant-clad blonde part of it, was rushing up.

In the split instant before their headless but still violently wrestling Man Bats crashed to earth, Toka and Molak leaped oppositely clear. Toka lit in fighting balance and whirled for Roya with his battle-ax swinging. But beyond her, Molak was racing for her too and would reach the helplessly bound girl before Toka could.

Molak's double-bitted great ax was a blue blur of viciousness as his triumphant voice cracked to Toka, "Quit or I'll kill her!"

"Toka!" cried Roya as, back to Toka, she starkly watched the crazed Molak tearing for her.

Even as he raced on legs frantic with fear, Toka snapped out his battle knife with left fingers. His left arm whipped forward and his blade was a vicious glitter of black desperation in the blazing sunlight. Molak was a dodging streak two paces beyond Roya. Toka was a frenzied four paces this side of her as his angry blade sang over her taut loveliness and streaked hilt-deep into Molak's right shoulder with a meaty thud.

MOLAK'S evilly sharp features contorted with pain as the blade evidently bit into a nerve center. The screaming blue battle-ax shot from shocked fingers and spun straight for Toka as he leaped to clear Roya. Toka convulsed in mid-air but Molak's bitted ax head rang along Toka's skull and careened away over Roya. Toka felt his deep scalp gash healing swiftly sound, but this searing hot red world was spinning around him. His own speeding ax loosened, shot free, careened away as he crashed to the hot sands with a wild vision of a sneering Molak charging with a blue knife in one hand and a black one in the other.

"Toka!" Roya's cry was an icy bolt of fear that cleared Toka's hot daze as he rolled away.

But Molak was towering above him, knives glittering viciously as they plunged down with deathly certainty. Toka twisted, tangled his feet in Molak's ankles. Molak's knives were slashing Toka's hard legs to the bones, but Toka kicked. Molak stumbled, crashed backward, away from Roya. Toka felt his leg wounds heal sound via the miracle water berry powers as he scrambled clear.

Molak was leaping up as Toka, with two hands full of sand, was poised in front of Roya. Toka hurled the fine sand into the charging devil's mad features. Molak flashed his knife-filled hands to block the blinding red powder, but it was spattering into his face, its many sharply faceted granules biting into his crazedly glittering green eyes. The tide had turned for Toka. He danced in with ready hands.

But with eyes streaming tears and right hand flashing blue blade in a frantic defense, Molak leaped away and whipped Toka's knife at him, apparently by sound. Toka leaped aside. And the accurately hurled black blade only sang hungrily along his left ribs and hissed down and back even as the long wound closed soundly.

But in that following split instant there was a gasp of sharp pain and the thud of a stone hilt socking home into living flesh.

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Toka whirled from the wide-open Molak. The bound Roya lay rigid, lovely features writhing as the fancy black hilt of Toka's battle knife jutted from her gentle swell of right breast.

Toka was to her, stark fear tearing at him. "Did you eat water berries on Sandcliff before Molak took you?"

Her quiet, "Yes," quivered with pain.

She had eaten berries! Thought that was long back and much had happened to burn away the powers she had stored. Yet there was hope if only—

Toka carefully drew his blade free and saw not much blood trickled, saw the wound begin closing, but not nearly as fast as he would have liked! Yet they had no more water berries or even Bat milk here! Roya's only chance was to lie perfectly still, not to be moved or jostled the slightest until that wound had time to heal deep within her.

"Don't move, dearest," Toka intensely whispered. "Don't move—for a while."

Roya's trusting blue eyes held Toka's dark ones an eloquent moment. "I won't move, Toka."

THERE was a poisonous snarl behind Toka. He whirled up with black blade flashing in time to meet the no longer sand-blind Molak. Yes, the one moment when the Mad Molak could have been easily disarmed and knifed to death was past. And Toka stood before Roya now and powered his renowned battle blade with every skill a warrior could know. But the Green-eyed Molak was also of the master warrior class. The viciously professional blades clashed, rang, spat angry sparks. Again and again they darted and slashed opposing hands and forearms to the bone. But just as swiftly these wounds, too, healed sound; there was yet no advantage here of water berries or Bat milk.

The fiery heat of these sun-seared wastes was crushing in now. The sweat began pouring from Toka's dust-caked and gore-splattered body, began glistening wetly on Molak's clean powerful physique. But swifter and fiercely swifter, till they were no more than streakings of blue and black, the great blades flashed in ravenous searching. Molak danced around and tried to draw Toka from Roya, tried to put Roya between them. But on feet and legs of tireless skill Toka countered each maneuver. And as Roya lay so starkly still and trusted so on his battle skill, Toka felt sweat and blood now oiling in his hand, felt his weapon becoming insecure of grip. Yet Molak, too, must feel the handicap of the pouring sweat and drops of blood. Yet neither dared pause to dry his palm or change hands, for the first to lose his knife would lose his life an instant later.

As Molak weaved and slashed on in snarling viciousness, sweat was soaking his thin, pale yellow hair, was rivering down his arrogantly sneering features and thickly corded neck, was streaming down his powerful chest and tapering torso and quick muscled legs. And as Toka danced always before Roya and fought on with terrible fierceness, he felt sweat pouring through his dust caking and goriness, washing it away, sopping him slippery from head to toe. But there was no weakening in Molak, only a terrible driving craziness. And there was no weakening in Toka, only a white-hot rage, desire to kill, to destroy this foul enemy!

Toka drove his black blade with even more savage speed. The sneering Molak matched the ferocious pace, notched it even higher. His great blue blade slammed into Toka's. Toka felt his slipping from his oiled grip! Yet so did Molak's, and both angry blades spun futilely away.

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"Now you Sandcliff idiot!" snarled Molak, and charged with fists flying.

Toka leaped to meet him in savage gladness. His fists sawed into Molak's sweat-pouring face. Molak's fists slammed into Toka's sweat-wet hard midriff like giant hammers. Toe to toe and powered by flaming hate they stood in an inhuman slug test with rock-hard fists a blur of pistoning. Skin split and healed and features mushed and revived. To belly to chest to face to chest and back to belly their vicious fists bit and slammed. There was no thought of retreat, only slug, slug, slug to kill.

AND features giving under slamming fists, bodies welted from punishing blows, now healed slower. Yet Molak refused to give, and Toka only slammed his fists harder. Molak drew upon deep wells of Bat milk strength and notched the terrible pace faster. Toka called on his own depths of berry power and met the challenge. Molak's breath was coming and going in labored raspings, yet he seemed tireless and inexhaustible, made of something hellishly indestructible! Toka's lungs seemed to sear with each deep breath. His throat was a dry hotness, his mouth parched and burning, stuffed by a swollen tongue of wooly dryness.

But his arms were flying rams of hate, driving now-bloody fists into Molak's snarling face and still-powerful body. Molak's fists drove no less viciously, were no less bloody. Bat milk and water berry power was burning away. But Toka was ragingly insensate to pain. There was only one goal, one thing for him: Molak and kill him! For the Mad Molak there was only Toka now, to be killed, beaten into Death. The hate between the two was a white-hot roaring blaze that only final everlasting death would cool.

Through a crimson haze now, Toka saw a bloody and snarling devil—a wild beast, never backing, never weakening. Toka plumbed the wells of his being for the power to drive his fists. To falter now was death, and worse than death for the stilly lying and starkly watching Roya at the hands of a victorious and hateful Molak.

Toka's bloody fists blurred on with fresh savagery and new power of desperation, bit viciously into Molak's already bloody body. The throbbing veins of Toka's dripping forearms ridged out with supreme effort. His jaws clenched till they ached unnoticed. His breath rasped in and out from lungs that must burst with raging fires of pressure.

And the snarling Molak was weakening! His great fists drove with perceptibly less power. Or was it only that Toka was so insensate to pain? No! Molak was giving a step!

Toka's fists sawed on with a triumphant blur of bloody viciousness. Molak was retreating now, his pulped features written with approaching defeat. Toka raged in and in and in and in. Molak backed dazedly away. Toka charged on in violent determination, slammed his fists into Molak's desperate guard, tore it down, ripped his fists into Molak's laxing face, hammered them into Molak's quivering belly, thundered them on Molak's laboring chest, smashed them twistingly again into Molak's bloody pulp of face.

Molak reeled back, his mad burning eyes glazing. Toka the Killer followed and drove his fists, drove them and drove them and drove them till Molak's legs began buckling. Toka's triumphant fists slammed to Molak's sagging jaw. Molak sprawled with a hoarse rasping cry and fell against the yet-convulsing body of a gigantic Man Bat, fell into its twitching and grasping hands.

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Through his bloody haze, Toka saw ten giant green-nailed purple fingers snap hungrily around Molak's throat and tighten till Molak's powerful neck flesh bulged blackly over the finger edges. Molak convulsed in stark panic and clawed frantically at the purple fingers tightening so inexorably on his life. But the purple hands only vised tighter. Molak's bloody pulp of face was purpling, his green eyes bulging, his torn mouth widening in vain effort to gasp on breath. His bloody body grew weaker and weaker. His bloody hands finally lay twitching at his fingered throat. His body shivered once, then, muscle by muscle and cord by cord, slowly laxed and lay still, as did the headless body of the Man Bat. Molak's green eyes rolled, then stared glazedly. And Molak was destroyed at the hand of the very Man Bat he had blinded, one of the creatures he had turned to evil courses.

"Is it—over?" Toka heard from a far distance.

HE SWAYED around. Through the haze in which blue sky and blazing sun and red earth gyrated crazily, he saw the cool, disheveled, clean-lined figure of Roya, lying patiently waiting. Calling on his last shreds of strength, he lurched toward her.

His voice was harsh, thick and dust-dry through torn and feebly healing lips. "You feel all right, Roya?"

"I'm all right, Toka. I'm all right." Her voice was trying to steady him, rally him.

Beside her, his trembling knees buckled. She rolled over and he began working at her wrist bonds. The knots were made in Hell. His fingers, numb from terrible battle, fumbled and slipped. And the gyrating world seemed darkening, seemed cooling his bloody and sweating spent body.

Was this the way death approached? Kill Molak, and now—

"Keep it up, dear," rallied Roya's voice. "They'll give."

Toka shook his whirling, pounding head, strained to make one last effort. But everything only grew darker, the terrible roaring in his ears only pitching higher. He fought himself to stay kneelingly erect, to free Roya. If her hands were free, he dully knew, she could eventually free her ankles and try to save herself.

The knots at last *seemed* giving, or was it his reeling mind? An end of rope *did* come free, and Roya was wriggling her wrists free, was sitting up. Her face, framed in golden hair, was anxious at him.

"Just rest, my dearest," he heard. Overwhelming exhaustion dragging him down and down, he closed his eyes and let the eternal weariness take him. Dimly he heard movements beside him, then a cool hand on his face, then two holding his hands.

"Just rest, my dearest," soothed her cool, low voice.

It was like balm to Toka's spent being. "It's all over," he muttered. All over? Roya was days from Sandcliff or the cavern, was without food or water or transportation, on an uncharted and vast desolation.

"They'll come for us, Toka," rallied Roya in understanding. "You'll be all right, and they'll come."

Toka could almost believe it, the quiet, sure way she said it. And there seemed a trembling of the sandy earth on which he lay, in his ears distant rolling thunder. Then it was gone. A wishful dream. He opened his eyes. Against a star-lit night he saw the concerned face of Roya, close above his. He absently noted scattered blue battle gear glowed softly—markingly—off about.

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"Thought I heard something," crookedly grinned Toka.

Roya smiled. "I heard it too, dear."

And faint but clear on the still night air *did* come the steady rolling, rolling, rolling thunder—of great feet racing down the distance. And toward them, and from out the southwest, a cloud was a roiling shadow against the star-pricked heavens. It was a wave of new strength to Toka.

He held Roya's warm loveliness closer to him. "Guess we won't have to walk home, after all."

"Home," breathed Roya. She held tight to him and searched her cool lips onto his battered ones.

And Toka drank deep, began filling his exhausted depths with her.

THE END

☆ WERNER—FAMED GEOLOGIST ☆

ABRAHAM GOTTLOB WERNER, father of German geology, was born in Upper Lusatia, Saxony, on September 25, 1750. He was educated at Bunzlau, Silesia, and in 1764 joined his father at Count Solm's iron-works at Wehrau and Lorzendorf, with the idea of ultimately succeeding him as inspector.

At the age of twenty he entered the famous mining school at Freiberg, and after graduating there with honor he supplemented his general education with a course in law and minerology at the University of Leipsic. His published monograph on fossils won him the position of assistant instructor at Freiburg mining school where, for forty years he served as major professor and taught his specialty so brilliantly that he gained for that school a great reputation and it became one of the centers of scientific intelligence in Europe. It attracted students from all parts of the civilized world and, for a time, Werner was regarded as the supreme geological authority.

One of the distinguishing features of Werner's teaching was the care with which he taught lithology and the succession of geological formation; a subject to which he applied the name geognosy. His views on a definite geological succession were inspired by the works of J. G. Lehmann and G. C. Fuchsel. He showed that the rocks of the earth follow each other in a certain definite order. He had never traveled, and the sequence of rock-masses which he had recognized in Saxony was believed by him to be of universal application.

But there was a fatal error at the foundation of his system of rock genesis and classification. It was based on their mineral composition, rather than upon their age, origin, mode of occurrence and relative stratigraphical position. He taught that all rocks were deposited by the ocean in the form of chemical precipitates; that granite has been in process of formation in various places throughout all the geological periods; that basalt and similar rocks as well as gneiss, schists and all lavas were a sedimentary deposit; that originally a universal ocean (the Noachic Flood) extended continuously around the globe, and out of which all the varieties of rocks then known were deposited by chemical action. To him, a volcano pouring out a stream of lava, was simply an elevation under which was a vast coal deposit which, by some means, at the time of eruption, had caught fire, and was melting and forcing out the water-formed rocks about it. And he defended these curious ideas with remarkable ability.

Hence arose one of the great historical controversies of geology. Werner's followers preached the doctrine of the aqueous origin of rocks, and were known as Neptunists; their opponents, who recognized the important part taken in the construction of the earth's crust by subterranean heat, were styled Vulcanist. R. Jameson, the most distinguished of his British pupils, was for many years an ardent teacher of the Wernerian doctrines.

The fact was that Werner, being a devout churchman, felt himself under obligations to employ his great powers and reputation in the construction and defense of a theory which could be squared with the orthodox concepts of Creation, as told in the book of Genesis. And for a time he succeeded brilliantly, for the influence of the Church in his day was supreme. Even the American geologist, Silliman, being a deeply religious man, clung to Werner's view to the end of his days.

When Lyell's great work "The Principles of Geology" appeared in 1830, Werner's star began to set, and his theories are now almost forgotten. Nevertheless, he is entitled to be remembered as a man of high personal character and unusual ability as a teacher. In spite of the errors at the foundation of his theories he was the first geologist after Hutton to attempt to arrange systematically such facts about the past history of the globe as came to his knowledge in the rather limited region in which he made his observations. These he reported conscientiously, and although he erred in their interpretation science is indebted to him for so clearly demonstrating the chronological succession of rocks.

Carter T. Wainwright

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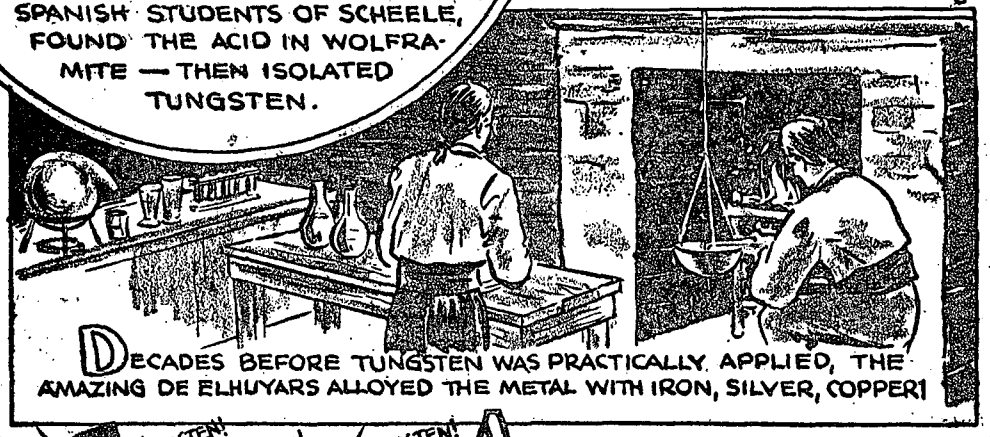
ROMANCE of the ELEMENTS

IN 1781 CARL SCHEELE EXTRACTED TUNGSTIC ACID FROM SCHEELITE. THAT STARTED THINGS. THE DE ELHUYAR BROTHERS, SPANISH STUDENTS OF SCHEELE, FOUND THE ACID IN WOLFRAMITE — THEN ISOLATED TUNGSTEN.

BEFORE THE MID-1700's, SAXON TIN MINERS ACTUALLY CURSED TUNGSTEN AS A NUISANCE! THEY THOUGHT THE TUNGSTEN IN A CERTAIN ORE WAS EATING UP THE TIN. SO THEY CALLED THE ORE "WOLFERT"— BECAUSE IT "ATE LIKE A WOLF!"



DECADES BEFORE TUNGSTEN WAS PRACTICALLY APPLIED, THE AMAZING DE ELHUYARS ALLOYED THE METAL WITH IRON, SILVER, COPPER!

ALTHOUGH THE WORLD AT LARGE NAMED THE ELEMENT "TUNGSTEN", THE GERMANS CALL IT "WOLFRAM". STRANGELY ENOUGH, TUNGSTEN'S SYMBOL IS "W," TAKEN FROM WOLFRAM!

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TUNGSTEN By Rod Ruth & Gordon McLean

TUNGSTEN is number 74 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is W and its atomic weight is 184.0. It has a density of approximately 19, and its melting point is 3400° F. which is higher than that of any other metal. It is used principally in the manufacture of high-speed tools, which can be heated to redness without losing their temper; and as the filament for incandescent lamps. It is also used for targets and cathodes for x-ray tubes.

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MEDICINE MAN MAGIC

By VINCENT H. GADDIS

There have been many weird stories about the Matto Grosso, but none to surpass this little true story of black magic!

WITHIN a few weeks while on his last expedition to Brazil the hair of Cyril von Baumann, noted scientist and South American explorer, turned from red to white. Accompanied by Dr. Alexis Grosland, the famous anthropologist, Baumann had penetrated deep into the Matto Grotto region and was headed for the country of the Parajukas. In a village of the Amakulas, where the two men decided to rest for several weeks, he became very friendly with the local medicine men.

Late one afternoon a white man, worn from jungletravel, stumbled into the village with a strange story. He told the two scientists that he was named George Whitley, and that he was a member of a Rockwell Foundation expedition consisting of Prof. and Mrs. Max Kohler, Kohler's secretary, a Miss Lydia Crane, and himself. They had arrived in the jungle about eight months previously, and were now located in a village six days away. By means of "jungle telegraph," they had learned of the presence of Baumann and Dr. Grosland.

Prof. Kohler, an authority on pharmacology, was dying, and Whitley had come for help. Misunderstanding the ways of the jungle, Prof. Kohler had angered a witchdoctor in a village of the Zapatos by taking the treatment of a sick native away from him. The witchdoctor, after making threats, had retired to his hut, and the following day the expedition had moved on to the Parajuka village where they were now located.

Eleven days later Prof. Kohler had suddenly become seriously ill. It was a strange sickness. Whitley told the two scientists. It was an illness similar to sleeping sickness, with a delirious effect on the mind without evidence of fever, which was followed by a stage of coma.

Leaving Dr. Grosland behind in the village, Baumann and Whitley started out early the next morning for the distant village. Six days later they arrived to find that Dr. Kohler was dead and Mrs. Kohler was ill. It was the same mysterious sickness. There were symptoms of fever, but the flesh was cold. Baumann was helpless despite his medical knowledge as he grimly watched his patient pass into a coma. The following afternoon Mrs. Kohler died.

Accompanied by Whitley and Lydia Crane, Baumann left the village the next morning to make the trip back. The day before their arrival Whitley was stricken. A stretcher was made, and the party struggled on. But as the village was reached at last, Whitley died.

Five days after their arrival, Lydia Crane, the last surviving member of the Rockwell expedition, became ill. Baumann, desperate, remembered that Prof. Kohler had been cursed by the witchdoctor. Could this mysterious disease be the result of *pappaloi* or black doll magic? The local medicine man assured him that a jungle curse was in operation. No time must be lost if the girl's life was to be saved.

Baumann's medicine man friend obtained some hairs from the girl's head and made a counter-*pappaloi* that would have a temporary effect in checking the original magic until the original doll could be destroyed. Early the next morning Baumann, with three natives, started for the Zapato village ten days away.

When he finally arrived he found the villagers unfriendly, but after presenting a large number of gifts he was given a hut and told that he could stay a few days. Baumann quickly located the witchdoctor's hut. The next morning he noticed the witchdoctor leaving the village, and he quietly slipped into the hut. Exactly as predicted by his medicine man friend, he found the magic dolls that had sent forth the evil blight of death.

Tied to an upright post that supported the hut's roof was the crude figure of a woman, made of clay, with six or seven darts imbedded in it. Three other discarded figures lay on the floor nearby. Following the instructions given him before he left, Baumann seized the figure from the post, carefully slipped out of the hut, and hurried to his own hut. He built a small fire. First he removed several hairs tied around the neck of the figure and threw them into the flames. Without these stolen hairs another figure could not be made. Then the darts were destroyed, and finally the figure itself.

Baumann and his native companions then quickly left the village. Several hours later the war drums throbbed behind them. But they managed to throw their pursuers off their trail, and at last the drums no longer tortured them. His mission was successful. Lydia Crane, at the very time that Baumann had destroyed the figure, had awakened

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from her coma, weak but rational. But in those few weeks, Baumann's hair had turned white.

Behind this amazing story of black magic as told by one of the world's greatest living explorers, is the unquestioned fact that the witchdoctors and medicine men of promitive cultures all over the world possess knowledge and abilities that we of civilized cultures cannot explain. This knowledge not only includes the secrets of the undefined laws of psychicphenomena, but discoveries of various plant and drug effects. A number of new medicines and chemical compounds from plants, including the insecticide rotenone that is safer than arsenic, originally discovered by medicine men, have been brought to civilization by explorers.

But the jungledoctors guard their secrets well. John W. Vandercook, several years ago, told of his observations of "snake cut," well-known to the Dutch scientists in Guiana. The witchdoctors take the head and tail of a deadly rattlesnake, cook it together with some herbs under a full moon, and then make a black powder from the mixture. An incision is made in the arm of a man, and this powder is poured into his bloodstream. From that time on the man has the weird power of paralysing a snake. The snake, no matter how deadly, becomes powerless at his approach.

Scientists have been able to analyze eighty percent of the ingredients, but the rest is still a mystery. They believe a certain exhalation in the perspiration, caused by this powder, has the power of affecting the snake, but this is only a theory.

William Seabrook has reported a number of medicine man miracles. Perhaps his most incredible observation was made in a village in French West Africa where he witnessed the stabbing of two children and the apparent healing of their wounds within a few minutes. The story, together with photographs, will be found in his book *Jungle Ways*.

In January, 1935, Dr. G. B. Kirkland, former government medical officer in Southern Rhodesia, told of his observations in a lecture before the International Institute for Psychical Research. Among the mysteries which he witnessed were many instances of telepathy and premonitions of disaster, the levitations of bones in mid-air without visible support, power over fire, the jackal dance, and murders by witchcraft.

No doubt mental suggestion is the secret of most witchcraft murders. The victim, believing in the power of the curse, actually brings about his own death. However, many observers have reported cases that cannot be so easily explained. The Rev. Richard Taylor, M. A., for more than thirty years a missionary among the Maoris, writes: "Many instances have fallen under the notice of missionaries where those bewitched have died, although unaware of having been cursed."

The eruption of Mt. Tarawera in 1886, which buried three native villages, was attributed by the Maoris to a curse made by an aged witchdoctor named Tukoto. A short time before the eruption, the wife of a nearby chief accused Tukoto of causing the death of her child. Angry at the unjust charge, he called upon the god of the volcano to destroy her village. Many of the natives left, although the volcano seemed to be extinct. When it erupted the flowing lava also covered the village of Tukoto, but the old man was dug out two days later unharmed.

As an example of future benefits that will be gained by all mankind when additional jungle secrets are solved by our scientists, let us turn to the story told by William LaVarre, famous South American explorer. LaVarre has long noticed the remarkable success of medicine men in treating various diseases by means of native plants, and he has brought back to civilization many new ingredients for modern medicinal formulas.

Several years ago, while in the jungles of Dutch Guiana, LaVarre witnessed the astonishing phenomenon of bone-bending. It is the guarded secret of the Djukas, a tribe of Negroes whose ancestors were sold to the Dutch colonists by slave dealers. The Dutch were unable to control these barbaric tribesmen from Africa, and after several bloody uprisings, they were released to return to their jungle life in the interior of Guiana. They live there today, as untamed as their native neighbors, and no white man can enter their domain without permission from their king.

LaVarre obtained this permission, and in one of their villages watched a medicine man heat a mixture of roots, leaves and whitish gum. The dark oily liquid was then poured into a clay-lined canoe. A boy, with one bow leg and one leg already straightened, was brought out of a hut and placed in the canoe, the slimy brew covering his legs. He slept in the canoe overnight. In the morning the boy was removed, and LaVarre noticed that his flesh was wrinkled and flabby. He was placed on a table, lying flat, and his bowed leg was forced down against the table top and tied in place. He remained in this position for several hours, then was again taken to a hut to await further treatment that night.

LaVarre learned that the treatment requires several weeks, sometimes months, and the bone is straightened a little bit at a time. Two weeks later, on his return trip to the village, LaVarre found the boy with his legs perfectly straight. He made an attempt to steal a sample of the bone-softening liquid so carefully guarded, but was caught and warned that he would be killed if another attempt was made.

Dutch doctors in Guiana know about this medical miracle. LaVarre was told by a government physician that X-ray photographs had been taken of Djuka boys living on the coast who had undergone the treatment and that their studies proved that the bones had not been broken and reset. Doubtless the day will come when this amazing solution, together with other jungle discoveries, will be known to our medical men and scientists.

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The ADMIRALTY'S STRANGEST MYSTERY

By VINCENT H. GADDIS

What really happened on this lonely bit of rock in this British lighthouse? Was it because of a weird prophecy?

THREE men and a lonely lighthouse—the tale of an old saint and his prophecy—the disappearance of the men and the scrawled log they left behind them to bewilder investigators with its puzzling statements—this is the mystery that the British Admiralty can't forget, one of the most baffling occurrences in the annals of the sea.

Only a few weeks ago, with the approach of winter, London newspapers again recalled the weird story, and again the admiralty announced that no new facts had come to light. The problem is still as dark an enigma as the day the relief boat landed the lone survivor on the rocky promontory of Eilean Mor.

Twenty miles off the coast of Scotland and east of the Outer Hebrides, lie the desolate Seven Hunter Islands. They are the rocky tips of ancient mountain peaks, bleak and forlorn beneath gray northern skies. The largest, only 500 feet across at the longest point, is Eilean Mor. Close to the sea lanes to Scottish and Scandinavian ports and the scene of frequent storms, the rocks were a constant menace to ships in the North Atlantic.

In the seventeenth century St. Flannan, then Bishop of Killaloe, decided to end his days far from human contact. He came to Eilean Mor and and built a small chapel out of the rough stone. His followers brought him food on infrequent visits. Here on his desert of stone, surrounded on all sides by the mightly Atlantic, the bishop found the peace and solitude he had sought. After his death a legend grew that on his island one could find eternal peace. Dedicated to the God of Land and Sea, it was holy ground.

So many vessels were wrecked on these islands, however, that in 1899 the British Government built a lighthouse on Eilean Mor. It was erected on the gneiss rock two hundred feet above the sea and was seventy-five feet high. The light was of 140,000 candlepower. Late in December the work was completed, and the building towered into the winter sky only a few feet from the crumbling ruins of St. Flannan's chapel.

As the Northern Lighthouse Board steamer, *Hesperus,* landed the four retired seamen who were to care for the light, a white blanket of snow covered the island and the strong winds of a northern winter howled around the structure and over the chapel ruins. They were left alone with food and supplies.

Joseph Moore, a bluff Scottish ex-mariner who escaped the strange fate of his companions, later, before a board of inquiry, told of his first day on the bleak rock. "The ship returned to Scotland," he said, "and that night we lighted the big lamp and shot the first rays of light. It was a grand sight. We all felt rather friendly toward each other for we were all seafaring men and knew what it meant to the sailors when they could see the light and steer clear of the dangerous rocks.

"But there was somthing strange in the air," he continued. "Not terrible or fearful but just a strange silence in the midst of the sea's roar, a peace that we could not understand. From the tower we could see the ruins of the old chapel covered with snow. And the wind howled. But there was something strange in the air. We all felt it."

The days passed into weeks and the weeks into months. Every two weeks the *Hesperus* arrived with supplies and newspapers, and left with one man who then enjoyed a vacation. Two weeks on shore and six weeks on the island was the schedule. At least the storms of winter passed, and summer arrived with its days of warm sunshine and fishing. A log was kept of their daily activities and the weather. The sea was quiet now, and passing steamers sometimes greeted them by tooting their fog horns. The days passed and finally, with fierce gusts of wind from out of the frozen north, winter came once more.

On December 6th, 1900, the *Hesperus* arrived and took off Joseph Moore for his two weeks' vacation. His companions, Thomas Marshall, James Ducat and Donald McArthur, were left as guardians of the light. The two weeks passed very quickly, and soon Moore found himself on the relief boat going back to the island. During those two weeks the sea had been calm, unusual for December, but a bad storm arose as soon as the *Hesperus* left land. For two days the ship battled the elements. During the nights the light could not be seen.

Finally, on December 26th, the sea calmed, and

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the vessel approached Eilean Mor. As it drew near, the whistle was blown, but no sign of life came from the island. The captain, puzzled, ordered the fog horn blown. Still no sign of life. Moore leaned on the rail and shook his head in astonishment. The captain decided he would land with Moore and look things over. The two men rowed over to the rock and went directly to the lighthouse. The building was empty of life.

Moore called out the names of his companions. His voice echoed against the cliffs below and only the booming of the surf answered his shouts. Quickly the two men searched the tiny island. Rocks, the chapel ruins, and the empty horizon of the misty and mighty Atlantic. A heavy silence, broken only by the waves at the foot of the cliff, hovered over the scene. The men had vanished. What could have happened to them?

Suddenly Moore thought of the daily log the men had kept in the lighthouse. It was quickly found, but it only served to deepen the mystery, for no stranger log was ever written. It told of a storm on a calm day and of hardened seamen crying without reason. The entries were in the scrawling handwriting that Moore recognized as Marshall's:

"Dec. 12—Gale. North by North-west. Sea lashed to fury. Storm bound. Never seen such a storm. Waves very high. Tearing at lighthouse. Everything shipshape. Ducat irritable."

The two men exchanged puzzled glances. There was no storm on that day. On the mainland, twenty miles away, and around the Outer Hebrides to the east the sea was calm. And what could that last phrase mean? Ducat, usually good-natured, had just returned from his vacation and had no reason to be irritable.

"12 P. M. Storm still raging. Wind steady. Storm bound. Cannot go out. Ship passed sounding fog horn. Could see lights of cabins. Ducat quiet. McArthur crying."

McArthur, a hardened seaman who had weathered the sea's mightiest blows in a tossing boat, crying! Moore realized that there was something very weird and extraordinary behind these strange entries.

"Dec. 13—Storm continued through night. Wind shifted West by North. Ducat quiet. McArthur praying.

"12 M.—Gray daylight. Me, Ducat and McArthur prayed."

Moore later reported that his companions were not praying men. In fact, he had never known them to pray at all. Fear was certainly not the reason they had prayed at noon while a storm, unobservable twenty miles away, raged outside. All three of the men had lustily defied the most terrific storms of the open sea and returned again and again for more.

The last entry was the most mysterious in the entire puzzling record. It read as follows:

"Dec. 15—1 P. M. Storm ended. Sea calm. God is over all."

So ends the strange log—eleven days before the relief boat arrived. The storm that delayed the *Hesperus* could not have been the storm referred to in the log. What tragedy was concealed and hidden behind these brief notes?

A board of inquiry was appointed by the British Admiralty. They arrived at Eileen Mor to find Moore and several sailors from the relief ship caring for the light. Moore was not anxious to find the "eternal peace" promised by the legend of St. Flannan. He refused to remain any longer on the island. His testimony was recorded and the island was carefully searched for any clues.

Finally the board adjourned—puzzled, baffled. The men could not have been swept away by the mysterious storm, if there had been one, for according to their log the storm had passed when the last entry had been made. The storm was over and peace had come.

Perhaps it was a peace that we will never understand. The years have passed, bringing no light into the darkness of the mystery. What happened to these three seamen on this lonely island is apparently a secret locked forever in the silent rocks of Eilean Mor, forever lost beneath the waves of the mighty Atlantic.

THE END

AN ADAM FROM THE SIXTH

By Richard S. Shaver

One of the most amazing writers of modern times comes to Fantastic Adventures with a story that you will remember for many years. A fantasy that is poignantly beautiful!

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SCIENCE: The MASTER MAGICIAN

By Preston Davis

Now that the atom bomb has become a reality, the world's interest is focused on the atom-breakers

IF THE average man was asked to pay a million and a half dollars to smash an atom, he might reasonably hesitate. Aside from the negligible factor that the average man does not have a million and a half dollars, he might logically protest that he didn't quite understand the purpose of all this explosive activity. In other words he might ask, very directly, "Why smash an atom?"

To answer that question it would be interesting to recount one of the most exciting experiments in atom-smashing ever conducted and to explain the results achieved and the future results promised.

At the Radiation Laboratory of the University of California, Dr. E. O. Lawrence constructed (in 1934) a remarkable machine known as the cyclotron. The instrument, the result of years of painstaking study and research, was designed by Dr. Lawrence to provide the massive punch that, he hoped, would smash its way through the formidable electron barrier of the atom into the nucleus.

Dr. Lawrence began his work not long after the first successful transmutation of the elements had been accomplished by the famous English physicist, Lord Rutherford. This great scientist had sent the alpha rays of radium crashing into the nuclei of nitrogen gas atoms and, after the shooting was over, out came oxygen. What had happened was simply that the alpha ray bullets had knocked a few particles out of the nuclei and, since the nature of any element is dependent on the size and pattern of its nucleus, the rearrangement of the nitrogen nucleus resulted in the formation of oxygen.

Physicists throughout the world who repeated this experiment found that when atomic nuclei were rearranged under the impact of a flying particle, tremendous amounts of energy were released. This energy, locked up within the atom, leaked out when a few particles were split off the nucleus, and a little of it would go a long, long way.

The energy locked up within a fraction of a part of water, for example, would drive a battleship from New York to Liverpool and back again. Radium releases enough energy to raise its own weight in water to the boiling point every hour. A uranium atom when bombarded gives off 175,000,000 electron volts. It has been calculated that eight pounds of Uranium contain as much power as 6300 tons of fuel oil, and that a little over half a pound of uranium would warm a ton of water to 3,860,000 degrees Centigrade, or convert 386,000 tons of ice water to boiling water. Sir Arthur Eddington has estimated that there is enough energy in a drop of water to furnish 200 horsepower for a year. Dr. A. H. Compton of the University of Chicago believes that if we ever find the key to harness the energy of the atom for human use "our present civilization will undergo such undreamed of changes that to future generations we may appear as primitive as do the cave dwellers of the Stone Age to modern man."

Dr. Lawrence watched all this experimentation with avid interest. It soon became evident to him, as well as to other scientists, that the radium method of Lord Rutherford was not the ideal atom blaster. Not only was its use too expensive but it was not a very fruitful source of "alpha rays."

Lawrence, with this in mind, saw that he should abandon the search for some force naturally strong enough to force the atomic wall. Instead he proposed to take some weaker force and step it up by degrees until finally when unleashed it could overpower the atoms defense. This cyclotron was the method devised.

First, a circular chamber was placed between the poles of a magnet. Then all the air was removed and a heavy hydrogen gas allowed to flow in. Heavy hydrogen gas acts the same as the ordinary hydrogen except that it contains a positively charged particle or proton which is twice as heavy as the proton in regular hydrogen. These particles are called deuterons. Inside the cyclotron chamber was a heated filament that sent out a constant stream of electrons. These electrons colliding with the electrons surrounding the nucleus of hydrogen atoms would release the nucleus of the hydrogen gas for use as the atomic bullets.

Now the energy building began. The magnetic force set up by the cyclotrons magnet pulled these deuterons between two metal grids separated by a space across which an alternating electrical current of ten or fifteen thousand volts would be operating. The deuterons received a tremendous shock from the current and flew off toward the side of

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the chamber. The magnetic field, however, would bring the deuterons back again between the grids to once more receive the shock from the electrical current. Each time the energy imparted to the deuterons forced them to fly out in ever increasing arcs and with tremendously built up force. Finally, they circle so wildly that they reach out and slit the chamber wall over which the substance to be bombarded is placed. The impact of this built-up force is over eight million volts and its power is overwhelming.

Within a short time after Dr. Lawrence began his experiments, amazing results were announced. Iron atoms bombarded by the deuterons were broken up, some into atoms of cobalt or manganese, others into a new form of iron which, like radium, emitted streams of electrically charged particles. This iron was an artificially produced substance never before seen on earth! Familiar elements like platinum were actually converted into other elements like iridium and gold. Thirty-four different elements were bombarded by this cyclotron method, and all of them underwent a transformation, many turning into radioactive substances. Among the artificial radioactive materials produced were sodium, phosphorous, iodine, and even a degenerate form of radium.

The results achieved by this experiment have only served to spur on Dr. Lawrence and his fellow workers to even greater efforts. In 1940 a 4900 ton cyclotron (as contrasted to the 225 ton machine) was proposed as the next step. This machine, whose cost is estimated at over one and one-half million dollars, would be able to build up a neutron bullet with the energy of 175 million volts. It is to be built in a great structure in Strawberry Canyon in the Berkeley Hills where at least 500 feet will separate the tremendous amount of radiation from innocent bystanders. The control room may possibly be placed underground to provide an additional buffer for the laboratory.

The possibilities held by this machine are almost unbelievable. Entirely new forms of radiation and entirely new substances may be produced. It may be possible with this 4900 ton cyclotron to transmute any element into another at will, to produce any known substance and many new ones to order. It may mean the achievement of one of the great goals of science, complete mastery of the elements.

* * *

★ A MEADOW YIELDS A MIRACLE ★

HEART disease has taken more lives than any other physical cause year in and year out. For generations baffled doctors have battled that tragic killer of men in their prime—the heart ailment known as coronary thrombosis—with only a few feeble weapons at their disposal and a great deal of doubt and despair in their hearts. But now medical experts are pinning high hope in its newest discovery—dicumarol.

This drug made its appearance in a rather familiar way. Pasteur hit upon the cure for small pox by noting the effect of cow pox on a milkmaid's hands, and once more the cow has assumed an important role. A mid-western dairy farmer was puzzled by the strange illness of his cattle. All he could ascertain was the alarming fact that they were dying from hemorrhage. Taking two buckets of blood to the laboratory of Professor Karl P Link of the Wisconsin Agricultural Experimental Station, the distraught farmer appealed for help.

Professor Link and his associates turned their energy to this task and it was found that the animals had been eating spoiled clover. Research disclosed that something in this diet kept bovine blood from coagulating. Isolating and manufacturing synthetically the single anti-blood-clotting factor in the clover was a tedious process, but the final result is proving invaluable to man's well being.

Coronary thrombosis strikes most frequently at the hearts of men in the late forties and fifties. Statistics show that this type of heart trouble kills approximately twice as many men as women in the United States. Sudden death is caused by a blood clot that obstructs the heart's arteries, robbing the heart muscle of its normal supply of blood and oxygen. Dicumarol alone will not dissolve a clot that already has formed, but used in conjunction with heparin lives can be saved. Experts who are skilled in the use of dicumarol warn that every individual requires a different dosage and his requirements will vary from day to day. In order to adequately control the action of this powerful drug a special test is administered daily—the prothrombin time test—and the percentage of clotting substance remaining in the blood stream after each treatment gets less. If the prothrombin activity gets too low, there is danger of hemorrhage which can be counteracted only by a transfusion of fresh blood or by large doses of Vitamin K.

Science has made many discoveries during the past decade. Dicumarol ranks with the miracle penicillin and sulpha drugs.—*Sandy Miller.*

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READER'S PAGE

STILL FIRST!

Sirs:

"Mister Anonymous" by David Wright O'Brien in your December, 1945, issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES "rang the bell" with me. For sheer suspense and quick action this yarn, in my estimation, led all the rest! Running a close second, however, was "Jewel of Death" by Chester S. Geier. This story, perhaps as it was designed to do, leaves one guessing whether or not the mysterious pendant really did cause death . . . or whether death followed its touch through the power of suggestion. The end was "atomic bomb-ish" . . . to coin a word . . . and nearly floored me with its smashing climax! More power to Miles Shelton, too, for his story of a world of women, entitled: "Woman's Island" . . . amazingly "different" . . . and in closing, may I say that ALL the illustrations in your magazine are wonderful? I always thumb through the magazines at the newsstands before I buy 'em to get an eyeful of the "pictures" . . . and the weird, attention-compelling illustrations were really what finally convinced me that I couldn't afford to miss this magazine! I'll be looking for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES regularly, from now on . . . thanks for your fine group of writers and artists!

Mrs. Muriel E. Eddy
125 Pearl Street
Providence 7, R. I.

The last stories of David Wright O'Brien are being published swiftly, and each one tops the fan mail. We hope you still get that old kick out of popularity, Dave, wherever you are! We are discovering that you'll never die in the minds of your readers. They just don't forget a guy who was really good.—Ed.

QUESTIONS

Sirs:

Although my brother has been reading your *Science-Fiction* and *Fantasy* magazines for several years, I have just discovered them. I have, though, obtained several back issues of the magazines. I enjoyed Mr. Pelkie's novel in the current issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES very much.

Now that the war is over, I suppose that your magazine will again be published monthly and in the large size with many of the old authors in the magazine again. I would very much like to read some stories by Edgar R. Burroughs. Will he write for you again in the near future?

I enjoy art work by St. John, Finlay, Paul and Settles. Will you ever print any covers by Finlay?

One of the best features in the magazine (FANTASTIC ADVENTURES) is the Reader's Page. Too bad it isn't bigger.

When are you going to publish the sequel to Browne's story, "Warrior of the Dawn"?

William D. Cox
485½ Hartford Ave.
Los Angeles, Calif.

Paper is still our bugaboo. You see, they've released it now, so you can't get it any more! But we'll go monthly the instant it's possible. Burroughs has promised us everything he writes. Finlay is still in the army, so it's hard to tell what he'll be able to do for us. Browne's sequel has not been written as yet. But we have hopes. How about it, Mr. Browne?—Ed.

AFTER ALL, THE STORY'S THE THING

Sirs:

First I should like to make a request of Mr. Martin Caidin. First, look at the title of this magazine, then like the Arabs, softly steal away—and go soak his head. I am sure such criticism would be appreciated by an aviation magazine. I am sure Mr. Barclay did not intend his story to deal with fact. To illustrate my point, take the story, Dr. Zanger's Cats. Here's a story that could be picked apart by anybody with a little knowledge of medicine and psychology. (But it was a good story.)

I can't say I cared much for Diamond of Doom (I don't get it). I didn't like The Lotus Temple. I did like Dr. Zanger's Cats.

E. Vernon Smith Jr.
62 Delevan St.
New Brunswick, N. J.

We always welcome corrections, but frankly, aviation terms bewilder us too!—Ed.

PRAISE FROM BRAZIL

Sirs:

I have just finished the July FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and I want to give you my congratulations for that wonderful magazine.

Unfortunately it was the first time I saw this magazine in Rio. I would like to read the past numbers and I'll look for it in all book-sellers from here.

My hobbies are reading and writing—it's almost like some mania—I thoroughly read all and every book and magazine I happen to get in my hands.

I beg to take your time with a request, a pledge

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to the Pan-American good neighborhood and friendship.

I always wished to correspond with somebody somewhere, to learn a couple of things about the life and customs of our good and allied neighbors.

In the back issue, you published a letter entitled "Plea for Pen Pal." Well, I would like to have some pen-pals in the States, so, if you can put in print my letter, or my address in the correspondence corner, probably I shall receive some letters.

I'm 22 years old, brown hair, blue eyes, and I work in the Juridical Department of Banco do Brasil.

I would like to hear from somebody—boy or girl who wants to write to Brazil in English or Spanish.

Be sure that I would never be able to express my gratefulness, and that I remain always

Maurilo Salazar de Oliveira
Banco do Brasil—Direcao Geral
Distrito Federal—Brasil A. do Sul.

How about it, you other readers? Here's a chance to learn all about Brazil first hand. And, Mr. de Oliveira, we are glad to know you enjoy our magazine so much.—Ed.

ROBERT BLOCH ON THE RADIO

Sirs:

Tonight, I heard a dramatization of Robert Bloch's "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper" on the Kate Smith Show. It was quite unexpected and thoroughly enjoyable.

I think Robert Bloch is trully a great writer. Have him do a "Ripper" story for FANTASTIC.

Where's Nelson Bond? He's had just one story (Saint Mulligan) since "When Freemen Shall Stand." Ask him for another long one for FANTASTIC.

Five best stories since inception: "When Freemen Shall Stand," Nelson S. Bond (Nov. '42); "Return of Circe," Nathan Schachner (Aug. '41); "Madness of Lancelot Biggs," Nelson S. Bond (Apr. '40); "Chariot of Death," Don Wilcox (Aug. '43); "The Electrical Butterflies," Ross Rocklynne (Mar. '42).

Wanted: More stories like: "Rocklynne's "Warriot Queen of Lolarth" and "Intruders from the Stars" (the prologue was beautiful), Irwin's "Vengeance of Martin Brand," Swain's "Persian Carpet," Farley's "Hidden Universe," and "The Immortality of Alan Whidden," Weinbaum's "New Adam," Bond's "That Worlds May Live" and "Gods of the Jungle," Wilcox's "Disciples of Destiny," Coblentz's "Crystal Planetoids," and R. Z. Gallun's classical short "The Eternal Wall." All from *Amazing*.

Suggestion Dept.:

Take Jones off the cover and don't put Smith on it. More covers by Rod Ruth (he painted the most fantastic scene in the story, Feb. 1943). An illustration for every ten pages if the story is twenty or more pages long. Keep Hadley. Shoot Jackson, Smith, Kohn and Arnold. Trimmed edges???? (No, I guess not.) Another cover by McCauley like the one for "The Vengeance of Martin Brand," Aug. 42.

Heavenly Thoughts:

Reprint the "Ship of Ishtar," (Merritt) with illustrations by McCauley or Finlay. Many of the newer fans have never read this and since it is exceeded in quality only by the "Moon Pool" I am sure it wouldn't damage your policy of "new stories or no stories." Put it to a reader's vote.

How about a cover by Finlay (he hasn't been on *Amazing Stories* or FANTASTIC ADVENTURES yet) about stories by Rocklynne or Bloch?

Discussion of the February issue:

Covers: Front—Ruth is pretty okay with me; Back—Settles is awful. He can do much better.

Interior decoration: (pun!) Krupa—for O.Q.O. V. was nothing to shout about. His pictures (?) for L.T.T.E. and A.T. in T. were nothing short of terrible. His pictures seem to be lacking in something. Virgil Finlay: Better than ever. Has anyone taken the original yet?

Harold W. McCauley: Great! He could even make a cowboy picture look good.

J. Allen St. John: I am not very fond of his endeavors, although I did like his cover for the August 1942 issue of *Amazing*.

Robert Fuqua: Below the Fuqua Average.

Florence Magarian: She and her husband's work has the same kind of penmanship. So much so, in fact, that I can't tell which is the other. The picture for Feep was in true Magarian style.

Stories: No. 1, The Place is Familiar, (O'Brien) 2. Outlaw Queen of Venus, (West) 3. What's in A Name, (Livingston) 4. Musketeers in Paris, (McGivern) Feep's Arabian Nightmare as No. 5 makes an all-time low. 6. The other three are pathetically poor. Give us more like "What's in a Name."

Cordell Mahaney
722 Mini Drive
Vallejo, Calif.

Have you heard Robert Bloch's radio series, "Stay Tuned To Terror"? We think you'd like that one too. Bond, unfortunately for us, has become what is known as a "big shot" radio writer, and he just hasn't time for us any more. We have many stories by those writers you mention coming up, and even better than those you mention!

"Ship Of Ishtar" was recently reprinted elsewhere. We couldn't do it again so soon.

Finlay's originals, of course, are always snatched by someone in the art department, before we get a chance at 'em.—Ed.

KEEP VICTORY — BUY BONDS

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STORIES of the STARS—ALPHECCA

BY HENRY GADE

(See Back Cover)

THERE is an ironical little story connected with the constellation *Corona Borealis* in which the star Alphecca (sometimes spelled Alphacca or called Gemma) is located. Bacchus had a girl-friend named Ariadne, whom he took to the island of Naxos for a little love making. While there he gave her a crown—just before he left her there, deserted and forlorn. This crown is now sung in legend as the constellation just mentioned.

The constellation is located 20° northeast of Arcturus, and is the only almost perfect semicircular formation of stars visible to the naked eye. It consists of six brilliant stars, and a not-so-brilliant binary known as Eta, which flamed into supernal brightness, exceeding that of Alphecca itself, in 1866. Eta is one of eleven known instances of this mysterious occurrence that astronomy has failed to account for, since they apparently defy all the known laws of physics.

From this unknown basis, let's indulge in a little fantasy: On a planet circling Alphecca, artist Frank R. Paul has pictured a race of people who seem to be super-scientists. Pictured are a number of huge mechanical contrivances which seem to be capable of travel over almost any terrain. These globes are space ships which have come from the Alphecca planet to a huge cold world circling as a member of the *Corona Borealis* system. They have found it circled by a group of planets, all cold and dead, supporting no life. They have come for but one purpose, to bring this world into the family of habitable planet-supporting suns.

After much surveying, the completion of much preparation of an electro-magnetic nature, and the final application of a type of atomic "bomb," they retired to their own world and broadcast the radio emanation that set off the most gigantic explosion ever created by man—in other words, they created an atomic fire on this dead sun that caused it to spring into life.

For many months the sun blazed forth in its new glory, then settled down to the constant radiation it has maintained since then. It may be assumed that within fifty years, the system of planets surrounding it were sufficiently warmed to support life, and thus offered new worlds to colonize.

This picture of a god-like race is not impossible, and many occult researchers claim that a god-race such as this does exist, and that such collossal projects are carried out. Astronomy cannot say that this does not happen, but they can show us phenomena such as this going on which do not answer the natural laws of the universe. Perhaps they are man-made, who knows?

Going back to these space ships artist Paul has pictured, how would they travel through space? Here again we have a new theory which is today gaining credence among our scientists, that all worlds are created from "whirlpools" or vortex formations in the ether, which "condense" matter at their centers, and thereafter maintain the condensed world as such. These ships are constructed with great electro-magnets around their circumference which can be placed in phase with the vortex surrounding a planet and by rotating in reverse, thus be expelled from the surface of the world. Gravity, then, could be said to be the inflow of such a vortexial current. It might even be said these ships fall upward!

STATEMENT OF [I]E OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933.

Of [F]antastic Adventures, Published Quarterly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1945.

State of Illinois, County of Cook, ss. Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared A. T. Pullen, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Fantastic Adventures and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, W. B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Editor, B. G. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Managing Editor, Raymond Palmer, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. 2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; A. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; W. B. Ziff Co., 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; S. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Wm. B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; B. G. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustee, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is_____ This information is required from daily publications only.) ARTHUR T. PULLEN, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of September, 1945. [SEAL.] A. C. JEPI'E. (My commission expires March 16, 1949.)

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KEEP ALL THE BONDS YOU BUY

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STORIES OF THE STARS – ALPHECCA

Alphecca is a star in the constellation known as Corona Borealis. It is about th same size as our own sun, and could quite possibly have a family of plane similar to the solar system. For the details on such a planet, please see page 17

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